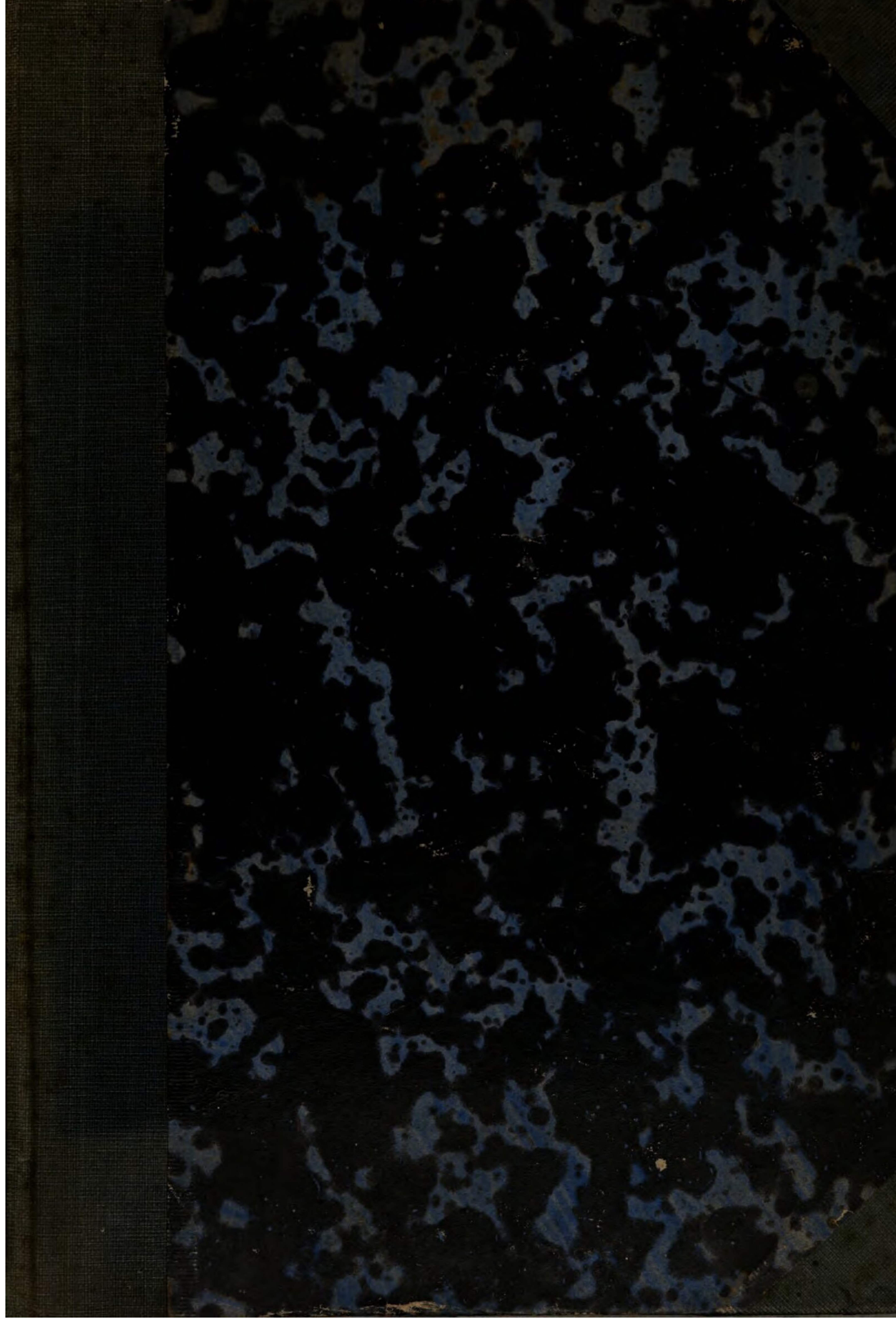




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POEMS AND ESSAYS

BY THE LATE

WILLIAM CALDWELL ROSCOE.

EDITED, WITH A PREFATORY MEMOIR,

BY HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW,

RICHARD HOLT HUTTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

ESSAYS.

LONDON:

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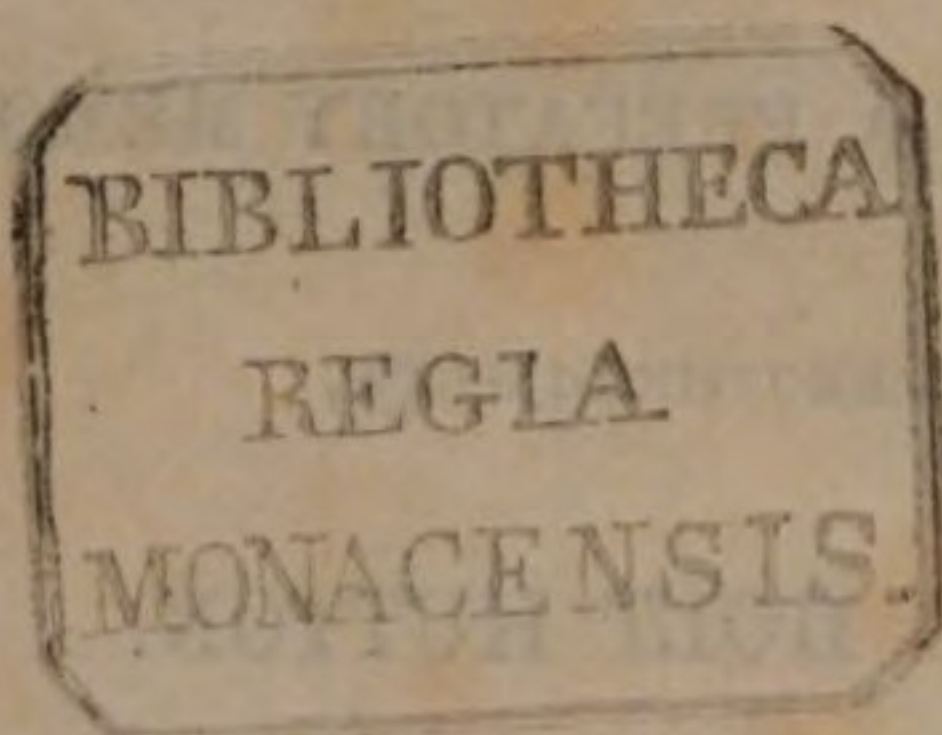
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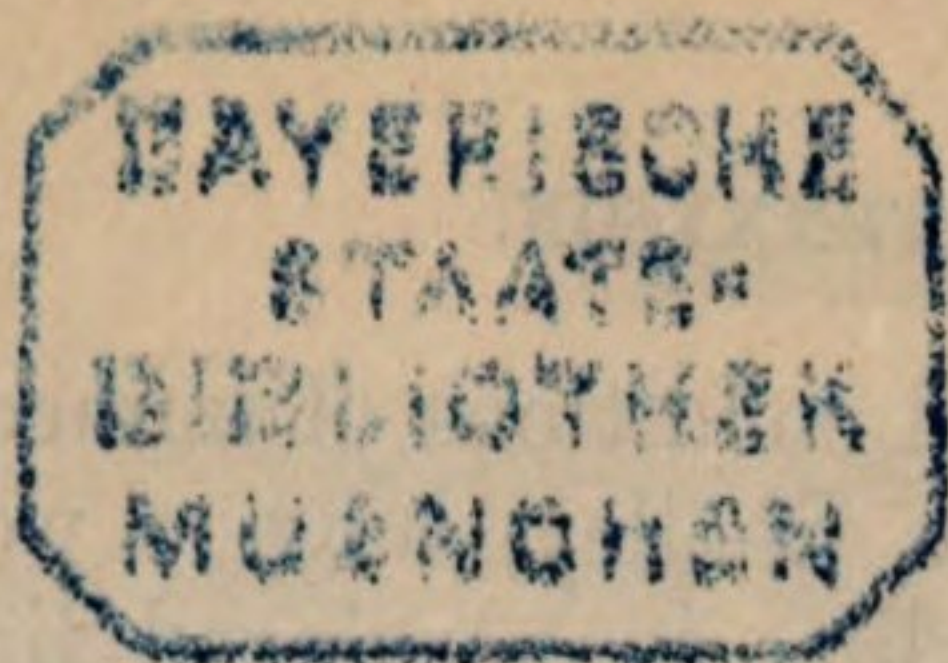
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ESSAYS.

TENNYSON.*

[Oct. 1855.]

THERE are two instincts of the poetic nature, two faculties of the imagination, either of which possessed in a high degree is calculated to secure for its possessor a more than common immediateness of popularity. The poet who can enter deeply into, and vividly reproduce, the characteristic elements in the thought and sentiment of his own time, has a hold on it by virtue of sympathy, and of that mysterious hankering after outward expression, which makes all men delight in having their thoughts spoken, and their feelings interpreted for them with a completeness they could never hope themselves to attain. He again has a not less binding claim, based upon their gratitude, who can transport them from the cankering cares of daily life, the perplexities and confusions of their philosophies, the weariness of their haunting thoughts, to some entirely new field of existence, to some place of rest, some "clear-walled city by the sea," where they can draw a serene air, undimmed by the clouds and smoke which infest their ordinary existence.

* *Maud, and other Poems.* By Alfred Tennyson, D.C.L., Poet Laureate.

These are the two broad conditions of immediate acceptance. Those who, like Shelley, have a world of their own, crossing and mingling in perplexed lines with the world by which they are surrounded, must, for the most part, wait for that to pass entirely away before they can attain to a just appreciation.

Tennyson belongs to the first class. His is a mind in exact harmony with the times in which he lives. Such minds spring up every generation or so in the history of a national literature. It is not always easy to trace their antecedents, and yet it is they who lead down the regular line of poetical development. The whole race of poets might be classed in two divisions, according to their unison with, or independence of, the age in which they flourish. The one form a set of successional links in a chain, they are the legitimate children of the times which produced them, they are elder sons, they have the family estate from generation to generation, they are members of society, and fathers of families; they have a numerous offspring; small poets of the same order spring about them like suckers from a tree; they are welded into the social order. The others may be men of not inferior genius; but they stand apart, like barren younger brothers; they are solitary; it is themselves they express, and no more; they may have occasional imitators, but they are neither the founders of schools, nor in them does any school find its culmination; they do not "look before and after." They are connected with their own times, of course, but only at single points. The first are waves, part and parcel of the great river of life rolling with it to the sea; the others are inlets, where the water whirls round while the main current rushes past. The one set are the hierarchs of the Established Catholic Church of poesy, the others are leaders among the Dissenters. To take a few familiar examples; Chaucer, Beaumont and Fletcher, Cowley, Pope, Byron, are of the legitimate line; Spenser, Ben Jonson, Milton, Swift,

Crabbe, are irregulars, and never has the contrast been more marked than in our own day, between Tennyson and Wordsworth.

Tennyson is the most *modern* of poets, that is, of great poets, and in the broad and permanent aspects of what constitutes us modern. Lesser poets may represent more vividly the transient phases, the accidents of the passing time ; but it is Tennyson who gives us back the true characteristics in small as well as in great matters. His *air* is modern. He dispenses with the old formalities thought necessary to poetry. He has cast the ancient costume. His dress is to the old forms what a wide-awake and easy morning coat is to a wig and claret velvet suit, or the high hat and tight pantaloons of the Regency. He has the free *insouciant* demeanour characteristic of modern society ; but of English society,—never American. His Muse, if she met you and liked you, would drop the Mr. from your name after ten minutes' conversation. She would cut the "right honourable" off her addresses to peers, and ignore the existence of the monosyllable, "sir." Tennyson goes to his object without preface and circumstantial delay. He does not think it necessary to tell you he is going to say a thing before he says it. You must find out his "Standpunkt" for yourself. And the publishing details are in accordance with this stage of development. His books are undefaced with introductions or annotations ; he cuts down a dedication to the very shortest limits, and deems the kind and courteous reader an extinct animal. In what may be called colloquial poetry he stands alone for ease and harmony, though leaning sometimes to affectation and mannerism of expression. This sort of style is abundant all through Mr. Tennyson's first volume, in such poems as "Dora," "Audley Court," "Edwin Morris," "Walking to the Mail ;" nowhere so easy and so harmonious as in "Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue," and nowhere so graceful as in the charming poem of the "Talking Oak."

Whatever we may have to say on Mr. Tennyson's "Maud," he is still master of this art, as will be seen by the following extract from one of the poems in his new volume.

"So Lawrence Aylmer, seated on a stile
In the long hedge, and rolling in his mind
Old waifs of rhyme, and bowing o'er the brook
A tonsured head in middle age forlorn,
Mused, and was mute. On a sudden a low breath
Of tender air made tremble in the hedge
The fragil bindweed-bells and bryony rings;
And he looked up. There stood a maiden near,
Waiting to pass. In much amaze he stared
On eyes a bashful azure, and on hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell
Divides threefold to show the fruit within:
Then, wondering, asked her, 'Are you from the farm?'
'Yes,' answered she. 'Pray stay a little: pardon me,
What do they call you?' 'Katie.' 'That were strange.
What surname?' 'Willows.' 'No!' 'That is my name.'
'Indeed!' and here he look'd so self-perplexed,
That Katie laughed, and laughing blushed, till he
Laugh'd also, but as one before he wakes,
Who feels a glimmering strangeness in his dream.
Then looking at her; 'Too happy, fresh, and fair,
Too fresh and fair in our sad world's best bloom,
To be the ghost of one who bore your name
About these meadows, twenty years ago.'

'Have you not heard?' said Katie, 'we came back.
We bought the farm we tenanted before.
Am I so like her? so they said on board.
Sir, if you knew her in her English days,
My mother, as it seems you did, the days
That most she loves to talk of, come with me.
My brother James is in the harvest-field:
But she—you will be welcome—O, come in!'"

And Tennyson does more than excel in colloquial poetry. His style throughout is new, entirely different from any thing the world has seen before, and exactly adapted to the day. Wordsworth insisted on an every-day

poetic vocabulary. Tennyson introduced a modern poetic phraseology.

Nor is his matter less impregnated with the dominant feelings of his time. He sympathises with the modern bent of thought. He is touched with the triumphant, somewhat boastful temper of an age of physical discovery. He exults in endless development. He tells us that

“The thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of
the suns.”

In this century men really have won new ground in one direction. They have enlarged the play of thought in the domain of science, and a fresh and rapid advance has given a forward attitude to our hopes and our philosophy. Tennyson is deeply tinged with this feeling. He loves to look onward over vast prospects of future time, and to imagine the heavenly order growing more clear and perfect. He leans upon the future; the “eternal process, moving on;” he would fain

“Take wings of foresight; lighten through
The secular abyss to come.”

Moreover he subdues the results to his uses; he has made science subservient to poetry, and is perhaps the only man who has done so. Not his, the “Lives of the Steam-Engine” or the “Chemical Affinities in Verse;” but his genius has boldly availed itself of new scientific ideas, just as they became sufficiently familiar to make them adequate illustrations and expressions of his meaning. Take as a single instance the fifty-fourth poem in the “In Memoriam,” familiar to all from its beauty, and the fifty-fifth, of which we quote enough to show how he is pursuing the idea through a suggestion derived from geological discovery.

“The wish, that of the living whole
No life may fail beyond the grave;
Derives it not from what we have
The likest God within the soul?”

Are God and Nature then at strife,
 That Nature lends such evil dreams?
 So careful of the type she seems,
 So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere
 Her secret meaning in her deeds,
 And finding that of fifty seeds
 She often brings but one to bear;

I falter where I firmly trod,
 And falling with my weight of cares
 Upon the great world's altar-stairs
 That slope through darkness up to God;

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
 And gather dust and chaff, and call
 To what I feel is Lord of all,
 And faintly trust the larger hope."

" 'So careful of the type?' but no.
 From scarp'd cliff and quarried stone
 She cries 'a thousand types are gone:
 I care for nothing, all shall go.' "

More than all this, when he has shared, sympathised with, used the scientific learning of modern thought, he can share too in the fears it excites; can express the dangers it holds in its hands, can warn it against the pride of independence.

"Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail
 Against her beauty? May she mix
 With men and prosper! Who shall fix
 Her pillars? Let her work prevail.

But on her forehead sits a fire;
 She sets her forward countenance
 And leaps into the future chance,
 Submitting all things to desire.

Half-grown as yet, a child, and vain—
 She cannot fight the fear of death.
 What is she, cut from love and faith,
 But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of Demons? fiery-hot to burst
All barriers in her onward race
For power. Let her know her place ;
She is the second, not the first."

There is another range of the characteristics of the present more important than these, and with which Tennyson's poetry is proportionally deeply occupied. It is he who, more than any other, echoes back the complexities, the subtleties, the difficulties of the more advanced stages of the world's history,—not as they appear on the broad historic ground, however, but as they spring from, and affect individual minds. It is he, too, who treads with closer footsteps than any other on the heels of those whisperings of the unseen that never cease to haunt us ; it is he who grasps most eagerly at the spiritual world within us and beyond us, who presses behind the curtain, who "stretches lame hands of faith, and gropes ;" to whom sometimes, like Stephen, the heavens are opened, and who sometimes fades into silence with the sad, almost despairing cry, "Behind the veil, behind the veil." We believe the very reverse of that theory to be true, which represents the infant ages of the world as lying closest to the spiritual and invisible mystery which permeates and embraces our mortal life. That portion of Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in Youth," which has made this doctrine so familiar, was probably suggested by Henry Vaughan's poem of the "Retreat," beginning—

"Happy those early dayes when I
Shined in my angell-infancy !
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white celestial thought."

The older poem gives expression to the sad yearnings of our nature after a lost purity and innocence. Wordsworth has taken the exquisite idea and imagery there

suggested, and, while improving its beauty a thousand-fold, he has transformed the original thought, and chosen to represent the child, not as allied in its unstained whiteness to the angel-world, but as emerging fresh from the world of spirits, retaining something of its light, and standing in closer and more conscious relations to it than the grown man. We apprehend the element of truth involved in this view lies in the fact, that to the early dwellers on earth, and to the child, external Nature itself suffices to excite those feelings of wonder, and faith, and longing, with which we now gaze into the unseen beyond it. The world is at once unfamiliar, and yet the spirit is in an unbroken harmony with it; and hence that which is to the child the spiritual world lies close about him; while we, whose imaginations, fleeting intuitions, and dim promptings, have apprehended another more hidden existence, try vainly to penetrate thither, and look back with envy on the child moving freely in that finer air of influence for which we pant; we confound his spiritual world with our own, and dream that an ante-natal splendour still glitters on his head. And for Wordsworth, indeed, this dream had a truth it has not for most men. He may be said, to the end of his days, to have moved in this child's world, and never, as a permanent state of feeling, to have penetrated beyond those more elementary spiritual influences, of which external Nature is the dispenser. The unseen, with which he is ever surrounded, lies in the hidden existence, the "sublime sense," which pervades the mountain, lake, and river, "the round ocean and the living air," which whispers in the night-winds, gives grace to the fleeting clouds, majesty to the sunset, and makes sad the shining stars. He is still in the child's universe. He brings to it a deeper yearning and a wider vision, an insight subtler, finer, profounder than the child's; but, like the child's, calm and unharassed. External Nature is satisfying to him. In this lovely earthly island, hanging in its mysterious limits of space and time,

he is content to gather beauty in the interior, among the mountains and woodlands ; he has no call to go down to the shore, and listen to the solemn roar of the mysterious sea, and waste his eyes in gazing over the dim and limitless waters. And so in the early ages of the world, the broad Homeric days, few and brief were the glances which even the most commanding intellect threw beyond the limits of terrestrial being. In Nature's hidden powers and influences they too found their field of spiritual curiosity. Occasional glances, no doubt, struck further ; and the profound spiritual convictions of the Hebrews furnish an exception to the general rule of this limitation ; but even their idea of the Divine Being was chiefly confined to his operations in this world only. As the world has grown older, its accumulated experience and gathered insight have never, indeed, sufficed to exhaust the mystery of the natural world ; but side by side with it another has been growing more apparent.

Every observant man must, we think, allow that mankind stand in a more peculiar relation to spiritual things than they have hitherto done. Spiritual things are at once nearer to us and less certain ; we feel them folding closer about us, and in another moment we doubt them altogether ; in proportion as they seem within our reach, is the terror mixed with our disappointment when we attempt to grasp them. Tennyson has expressed, in the most daring manner, the utmost intensity of this feeling:

“That which we dare invoke to bless ;
Our dearest faith ; our ghastliest doubt ;
He, They, One, All ; within, without ;
The Power in darkness whom we guess.”

More intimate spiritual convictions may in former times have possessed individual souls, but there never was a time when the invisible world occupied the thoughts and mingled itself with the daily interests of so large a mass of men as now. When another world was, to living and

dead alike, a *future* world, was relegated in universal opinion to a period beyond the undated sleep of the grave, men believed in it with less difficulty, and lived less concerned by it. Now there are a mass of minds who cannot conceive it as merely future; it is another coexistent world, occupied by the same vital interests as our own, and separated from us by a veil at once thin and impenetrable. And with the growing sense of its closeness and its importance have grown the eagerness of our questionings, the impatience of our uncertainties, the bold and face-to-face grappling of our doubts. Every now and then a new medicine is discovered; it is a specific; we indulge the hope that a disease is destroyed; and for a time it seems to work cures proportioned to its reputation. But before long there comes a reaction; it is found to fail; it seems to lose its virtue, even to become powerless, and falls into utter disrepute. And so how many books have been written to *prove* that which men most desire to believe, how eagerly have they been welcomed, how wilfully believed! how have thousands rested on them, who never read them, through their faith in those who have been truly convinced by them! Then, as the number spreads of those who judge for themselves, there are seen some who find they do not touch their symptoms. The rumour spreads that they are not infallible, and the gloom is proportioned to the over-confident hope. How many hands have been pierced by leaning on Paley's Theology! And it is the same of those who strive to disprove. How many a desperate charge has flattered itself it should cut through to the very standard of faith, and rushed on to be broken like breaking water, yet leaving terrible memorials of its power! Backwards and forwards rolls the tide of battle, and in proportion as the infantry of Trust wins its slow and painful steps forward, the more desperate and overwhelming seem the onslaughts of the enemy.

In the "In Memoriam" of Tennyson, this modern

conflict between a distrustful intellect and a ripening intuition (perhaps we should say, a more extended revelation) has found the fullest expression it has yet received from art. It was written at a time and under the influences which give to the struggle between the seen and the unseen its most momentous character;—the time when the wound is fresh—when a familiar life has newly passed through the dividing-gate, and draws the whole heart after it—when the affections throng the highest towers of the imagination, and stretch their vain and weeping hands into the void—when the very absolute *necessity* we feel for the things of faith seems to make us doubtful, and

“Like Paul with beasts, we fight with death.”

Not only are these the influences under which the “In Memoriam” was commenced; such a loss forms the subject-matter of the poems of which it consists. They portray, as all the world knows, the feelings excited by the loss of the author’s most intimate and endeared friend, the remarkable and highly-gifted Arthur Hallam, a man who died young, with little or nothing palpable achieved, yet whose brief life was not without a deep and permanent usefulness in the influences he exerted on the minds and characters of his associates. Few men have had so singular and so permanent an epitaph. It is not a direct glorification of the dead, still less is it a separate poem, graced with remote illusions. It is the very cry of grief versified; its brief successional stanzas body forth the fancies, the passing moods, the yearnings, the regrets, the questionings, the consolations that suggest themselves at such a time. They strike with a terrible reality to the experience of every heart. The publication at all of such a work must suggest many trains of thought which it scarcely comes within the scope of public criticism to pursue; that hesitation and difficulty which all truth-minded men feel connected with self-utterances must have

been more than usually operative here. The feeling itself has found its expression :

“I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel :
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within.

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
A use in measured language lies ;
The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold ;
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more.”

The deeper passion of grief finds no such utterance, we know. No man can both feel and speak it, for it is its very essence to be speechless. Servants of the dead may mourn, the children cannot.

“The lesser griefs that may be said,
That breathe a thousand tender vows,
Are but as servants in a house
Where lies the master newly dead ;

Who speak their feeling as it is,
And weep the fullness from the mind :
‘It will be hard,’ they say, ‘to find
Another service such as this.’

My lighter moods are like to these,
That out of words a comfort win ;
But there are other griefs within,
And tears that at their fountain freeze ;

For by the hearth the children sit
Cold in that atmosphere of Death,
And scarce endure to draw the breath,
Or like to noiseless phantoms flit.”

It is in these poems that Tennyson's wealth of thought and power of insight in the direction we are occupied with

is chiefly apparent. We must read them more than once or twice, to carry away an adequate impression of their real value and beauty. They are obscure enough to demand our attentive perusal, but rich enough to repay it. They are brief, inconsequent, disconnected. Their author has called them "wild and wandering cries," not entirely without justice. They are not poems, but utterances. Sometimes the meaning has to be laboriously disinterred; sometimes the words convey two meanings, and leave little or no clue to which was intended. In general, however, the sense will yield itself to a little patience. This no doubt is not what poetry should be; but there is gold to repay the seeker in the scattered thoughts that lie buried, and the surface is sown with beauty with a lavish hand. Still the want of clearness of expression and of completeness in form are prominent and much to be regretted. To make great thoughts familiar is one of the highest prerogatives of genius. No man enjoys it in greater fullness than Tennyson, and he should not lightly sacrifice it to the temptations of indolence and affectation.

It is the later poems which are at once the most thoughtful and the most open to the charge of obscurity. The first part of the book is occupied with the simple expression of the milder moods of feeling, or of those passing fancies which soften the intervals of a deeper anguish. They have often a tender calm about them which has given to the verses a finish and harmony that the others do not possess.

"Fair ship, that from the Italian shore
 Sailest the placid ocean-plains
 With my lost Arthur's loved remains,
 Spread thy full wings, and waft him o'er.

So draw him home to those that mourn
 In vain; a favourable speed
 Ruffle thy mirror'd mast, and lead
 Through prosperous floods his holy urn.

All night no ruder air perplex
 Thy sliding keel, till Phosphor, bright
 As our pure love, through early light
 Shall glimmer on the dewy decks.

Sphere all your lights around, above ;
 Sleep, gentle heavens, before the prow ;
 Sleep, gentle winds, as he sleeps now,
 My friend, the brother of my love ;

My Arthur, whom I shall not see
 Till all my widow'd race be run ;
 Dear as the mother to the son,
 More than my brothers are to me."

These verses are familiar to the memory of thousands ; and it is to these, and such as these, which soothe with pitiful fancy the less overwhelming experiences of grief, that we think the popularity of the "In Memoriam" is mainly to be attributed. It is not easy to believe that the more recondite poems which it contains—at once profounder, nobler, and more difficult—can ever engage a very wide circle of readers. These are not poems which men of various tempers shall be happy to find they have taken up by accident, and feel loth again to lay down. To those who have not passed through the fire, they speak but half their meaning ; to those who have, they recall too vividly the past experiences. The imagination seeks an excitement in art, but one remote from the painful experiences of actual life ; the backward paths of bitter memory are but too familiar to her. The things we have really suffered are no poetry for us ; they are the things from which we seek a refuge in poetry. The questionings, the cries of "In Memoriam" touch us too close—they wring us. The spiritual world is too real for us ; we fly to the material—

"The floods, the fields, the mountains,
 The shapes of sky and plain."

Nature is our solace ; and we fall back on Wordsworth with that sort of quiet confidence with which the entrance

of the calm, gentle, self-reliant physician inspires the fevered sufferer. We ask rest,—“passionless calm, and silence unreprieved.” Tennyson can do the same thing for us, but in rather a different way. He can remove us to a sphere so remote from our own, and reproduce it so vividly, with all its effect of diversity, that complete change of scene has the same healing power as rest. The worn and the weary turn to the “Morte d’Arthur,” or the “Ænone,” or to those wonderful efforts of genius, the “Ulysses” and the “Lotos-eaters.” Moreover there are times in the “In Memoriam” itself when he rises above the hungry questionings and sad confusions of grief, and grasps the true sources of its consolations with so prevailing a force as will bind him to many as the interpreter of their truest ultimate sources of dependence. Throughout he does “trust the larger hope,” “faintly” it may be ; yet the spirit of the whole work, summed up in the fine Introduction, is one of faith ; and if the questions be more numerous than the answers, we can only ask, how *can* it be otherwise ? His own estimate of the functions within his power is not overstrained.

“If these brief lays of Sorrow born,
Were taken to be such as closed
Grave doubts and answers here proposed,
Then these were such as men might scorn :

Her care is not to part and prove :
She takes, when harsher moods remit,
What slender shade of doubt may flit,
And makes it vassal unto love :

And hence, indeed, she sports with words,
But better serves a wholesome law,
And holds it sin and shame to draw
The deepest measure from the chords :

Nor dare she trust a larger lay,
But rather loosens from the lip
Short swallow-flights of song, that dip
Their wings in tears, and skim away.”

There is a dreamy, indolent air about Tennyson's poetry, an evident want of tonic in the system, which, again, is quite in accordance with the temper of his times. His sympathy is wide and warm; but it is that of the conviction and the conscience, rather than of the will. His poetry—take his political and social allusions, for instance—is full of the indications of noble instincts and true philosophy; but it comparatively interests itself little in right deeds. How rarely he deals with action at all! States of feeling, existing moods, quiescence; this is his natural ground. His is not the *vis tragica*. He has pathos, he has feeling; but his is not an intense and passionate nature; nor, with one or two remarkable exceptions, does he care to deal with such in his poetry. He stands aloof from the anguish and terror of the affections. He can touch the trials of the heart with a master's hand, but they must be those of the softer and more appeasable kind. It is in throwing a divine grace over the happier emotions, that his muse is most at home. She speaks nowhere so freely, perhaps nowhere so enchantingly, as in the "Gardener's Daughter." The same is true of his intellect. It wants neither breadth nor depth. Yet he is less remarkable for searching, original, and profound thoughts, than for his power of giving roundness and completeness to those which are before dimly discerned and half apprehended, but which he for the first time sets before us in their true significance and in their fairest aspect. He gathers and presents us a truth with the bloom on it. His thoughts, too, do not tread on one another's heels; they are never so crowded but that each can have a full and orderly development. The obscurity of "In Memoriam" does not arise from too thickly-swarming thoughts, but from the attempt to grasp too much in a very compressed phrase, and still more from the neglect of connecting links.

When we say Tennyson shares a vice of his age in being morbid, we use a current phrase which we suppose

carries something of a common impression to us all, but which nobody cares to define very clearly. Perhaps we mean, that he and all of us have a perverted tendency to take an undue interest in, and exaggerate the importance of, particular aspects of things which are such as lie apart from our wholesome, every-day life, the natural bent of our feelings, and the just and regular subjects of our attention. There is a trace of this in Tennyson's earlier writings here and there, and "Maud" overflows with it. If it be said that that poem is expressly devoted to the delineation of morbid character, the answer is, that a morbid tendency must have guided such a selection of a subject for art; and moreover that the treatment of it is morbid.

We have sufficiently vindicated Tennyson's right to a place in the nineteenth century, not unconfirmed by his actually existing there. Let us glance at the main characteristics of his artistical genius. He is at once the most *creative*, and the *least dramatic* of poets; the nearest to Shakspeare, and the farthest from him. He has in the very highest degree the fundamental poetic impulse. He fuses all things, and golden shapes spring from his mould, with only the material in common with his ore; rather, ideas are sown in his brain, and spring up in concrete organic forms. The passion to reproduce in concrete wholes, constitutes, indeed, that fundamental poetic impulse which we have ascribed to him. He may be didactic, philosophical, oratorical, sentimental; but all these things he encloses in a golden ball of poesy. He may have, and often has, an ultimate moral object. This is by no means inconsistent with the highest effort of artistic production, as has been sometimes too easily assumed. It is true, you cannot comply with the conditions of art, you cannot have the feelings of the artist, if you drive directly by the medium of verse at a moral result or an intellectual conclusion; but you may have these for your ultimate object, and you may embody them in true poetic forms. Most satires, Donne's for instance, or Juvenal's,

are only forcible rhythmical castigation ; Butler's "Hudibras," however, is a poem, and Swift's "Gulliver" has the same characteristic, though in prose. It is satire informing an imaginative body. Pope's Essays are moral, didactic, and in verse ; Kingsley's "Saint's Tragedy" is a moral poem. Dryden's "Hind and Panther," and the "Excursion," are instances where the imaginative embodiment is incomplete. There goes something more, however, than an imaginative mould to form a poem ; the whole matter of it must be transmuted by the imagination. What this process is, it is not perhaps possible to describe ; Coleridge, at least, would be the only man to attempt it ; but we can all feel the result. We have more words for the opposite thing ; we say it is dry, it is bald, it is *prosaic*. Tennyson has both these powers in the highest degree. In fact, he never writes mere verse, and is never prosaic. Whether it be thought or feeling he is expressing, he gives it a poetic body, and transfigures it in the light of a glowing imagination. The "Palace of Art" is a wonderful instance of an idea admirably adapted for poetic expression, developed in a poetic form, and with the utmost wealth of a powerful imagination, and a fancy that has scarcely a parallel in luxuriance. It was a daring flight to describe the Palace which a soul worshipping Beauty alone, should build up for her own enjoyment, and no poet since Shakspeare could have filled it with so concentrated a wealth of adornment as is here gathered together ; and when the soul is stricken in her high place, and the poet has to deal with the images of her despair, not less is every consecutive word instinct with the all-penetrating force of his genius.

" Deep dread and loathing of her solitude
 Fell on her, from which mood was born
 Scorn of herself ; again, from out that mood
 Laughter at her self-scorn.

' What ! is not this my place of strength,' she said,
 ' My spacious mansion built for me,
 Whereof the strong foundation-stones were laid
 Since my first memory ?'

But in dark corners of her palace stood
 Uncertain shapes; and unawares
 On white-eyed phantasms weeping tears of blood,
 And horrible nightmares,

And hollow shades enclosing hearts of flame,
 And, with dim fretted foreheads all,
 On corpses three-months old at noon she came,
 That stood against the wall.

A spot of dull stagnation, without light,
 Or power of movement, seem'd my soul,
 'Mid onward-sloping motions infinite
 Making for one sure goal.

A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand;
 Left on the shore; that hears all night
 The plunging seas draw backward from the land
 Their moon-led waters white."

In this poem the images of beauty and terror task to the utmost the genius of the author, and the whole is moulded into a real poem; it is a tale, the history of a soul, the reproduction of life—yet it is based upon the perception of a moral truth, and devoted to developing that truth,—the truth, namely, that for a soul to be absorbed in devotion to Beauty, even in its purest and most glorious aspects, the Beauty of Knowledge and the Beauty of Good, is for it to be false to something higher in its destination—that

"Not for this
 Was common clay ta'en from the common earth,
 Moulded by God, and temper'd with the tears
 Of angels to the perfect shape of man."

The "Two Voices" is simply, in its essence, an argument on the grounds for believing in the immortality of the soul. Now imagine Pope dealing with this subject in the same method in which he develops his proposition, that

"Two principles in human nature reign,—
 Self-love to urge, and reason to restrain."

Or recall how Young conducts a somewhat similar argument :

“What am I? and from whence? I nothing know,
 But what I am; and, since I am, conclude
 Something eternal: had there e'er been nought,
 Nought still had been: eternal there must be.
 But what eternal? Why not human race?
 And Adam's ancestors without an end?
 That's hard to be conceiv'd; since ev'ry link
 Of that long-chain'd succession is so frail;
 Can every part depend, and not the whole?
 Yet grant it true; new difficulties rise;
 I'm still quite out at sea, nor see the shore.
 Whence earth and these bright orbs?—Eternal too?
 Grant matter was eternal; still these orbs
 Would want some other father:—much design
 Is seen in all their motions,—all their makes;
 Design implies intelligence, and art;
 That can't be from themselves—or man; that art
 Man scarce can comprehend, could man bestow?
 And, nothing greater yet allow'd than man,
 Who, motion, foreign to the smallest grain,
 Shot through vast masses of enormous weight?
 Who bid brute matter's restive lump assume
 Such various forms, and gave it wings to fly?
 Has matter innate motion? Then each atom,
 Asserting its indisputable right
 To dance, would form an universe of dust;
 Has matter none? Then whence these glorious forms,
 And boundless flights, from shapeless, and reposed?”

Contrast this with Tennyson's poem, certainly one of the noblest in the English language. Observe that what he does is to reproduce, in a concrete form, the position of man towards his hope of immortality, as discernible through intellectual efforts. And the mode in which this is done, so that the poem shall not be an argument like Young's, is to represent a living soul on the actual rack of this question, inspired with all those varied feelings that actually do possess a man in such a situation, and to conduct his reasonings, not to a dry logical inference, but a resulting status in the convictions and mood of

such a man. Pope and Young were poets, but they were *uncreative* poets. Such men (who might also be called unartistic) reproduce things as they find them, either in wholes or fragments, embellishing or informing them with the imagination, according to their gift. One who is creative fuses them into a whole of his own.

A creative poet, however, is by no means necessarily what may be called an *initiator* poet. Shakspeare and Tennyson are remarkable instances of the very highest creative impulse, with a tendency to assume, at second-hand, the nucleus of their creative effort. They love to give a new body to an old thought ; they develop a suggestion ; they find old nuts, and grow trees from them ; they do not care to lay their own eggs. It is probable that Shakspeare did not invent the whole plot of a single one of his plays ; yet each is a true creation of his own. Shelley, on the other hand, initiated all his own poems, except the greatest of them, the *Cenci*. Wordsworth, where he lays hold of an incident or a scene, reproduces it just as it was ; where he creates, he creates all, starting-point included. Many of Tennyson's finest poems are based on an external suggestion ; such are "Ulysses," the "Lotos-eaters," "Ænone," "St. Simeon Stylites," "Morte d'Arthur," "Mariana," "Godiva," "Sir Galahad," "St. Agnes," "Lady Clare," &c. ; and of many others it is impossible to say whether they are thus based or not, only they do not, like the "Excursion," carry with them their own evidence of springing from the very germ, out of the poet's own mind.

To say that Tennyson's genius is not dramatic, is certainly to contradict some of his critics. Something depends on what is meant by the term. He certainly has the power of penetrating the mood of another mind ; but it will generally be found that this is another mind *in a special situation*, and this is a very different thing from exhibiting character *through the medium of situations and the self-expression elicited by those situations*,

and in this, we take it, consists the essence of the drama. Tennyson can grasp character, otherwise he could not express a given mood in accordance with a given character, as he certainly does in the "Ulysses;" but he has not the least taste for reproducing character as such; he subordinates it to the presentment of an incident, a train of thought, a sentiment, or a picture. If he has occasion to use the dramatic form of self-expression, the absence of any real dramatic force is at once perceived. The young prince who relates the "Princess," uses the first person singular throughout, without giving us any idea of himself beyond what we gather from incidental description. Neither he nor the princess imposes on us for a moment, when employed to develop Mr. Tennyson's views on matrimony. This we know is what they were created for, with all their charming environment of scene and incident. We have vivid impressions of them and all the other persons of the story, but it is because they are admirably described. There is nothing dramatic in it: Mr. Tennyson is betrayed to every observer pulling the wires, and scarcely taking the trouble to alter his voice for the separate characters. In the latest poem, too, "Maud," the narrator is a mere morbid mouthpiece, and a very strange inconsistent medley of morbid matter he utters, more than is compatible with any method in his madness; and some degree of consistency is absolutely essential to the dramatic maniac; for instance, he, definitively, must not be sane and insane at one and the same time, and it is better and clearer if he is not both dead and alive.

That singularly fine poem, the "Ulysses," best serves to illustrate the union in Tennyson of high creative genius with a foreign nucleus of conception, and the absence of all dramatic power. In this poem Mr. Tennyson takes a Greek legend, and catching it up at a single point, makes an original poem. He has been reading Homer, that is clear; but does he imitate Homer? No;

it is Tennyson tinged with Homer. He makes Ulysses speak, to delineate a certain mood in the mind of Ulysses ; one, however, which gathers up in it the whole of his character ; it is, therefore, true to that character, yet Ulysses we know would never have said that and in that way. It is what he would have said, if, retaining his antique simplicity, he had become modernised, and at the same time seen himself as Tennyson sees him through his nineteenth-century eyes. What a wealth of imagery and diction is lavishly yet guardedly employed ! There is a reticence of vivid, full imagination, which gives to the poem an inexpressible hold on the admiration of the reader.

We pass to a characteristic of Tennyson's genius, which, perhaps, more than any other, has won him his well-deserved place in the estimation of a people so deeply imbued with the love of natural scenery as the English undoubtedly are. He has a power of reproducing external Nature in words, which is absolutely startling. The mode in which he does this cannot be said to be peculiar to him, but he has been the first to employ it to such an extent, and with so absolute a mastery, as to create a new school. He describes Nature through an appeal, not to our ideas, but to our imaginative perception. His words do really, of course, rely on our knowledge of words, yet they seem to present new *things*. He might be said to write to our *senses*.

Shelley applies himself to our *already-gathered* imaginative associations with things ; and these associations are what he himself employs ; certain things, and even their representative words, to him contain certain impressions and impulses, and in this way he has in part *classified* the more distinct vehicles of special influences in the natural world. The face of earth was, with him, not made up of separate and distinct landscapes. Not that snow-clad range of Alpine brethren oppressing the air of Switzerland ; not the fair Italian scenes as he gazed on

them in his walks at Lucca, or trod the shore of the blue inland sea; not the special pictures which at various times she presented to his faithful and absorbed gaze, made up for him the aggregate of Nature. She was composed not merely of mountains, but of mountains modified by all that he had ever experienced in gazing on all mountains, of rivers and what rivers brought to his mind, fountains, winds, and flowers; all separate classes of beauty. Shelley's perceptions were so keen, and his sympathies so true, that he could give us back as it were the *essence* of every kind of natural object. Now Tennyson gives us back the things themselves, just as they stand in nature, with all the special environment that naturally belongs to them: he transplants a landscape into his pages. If he dealt through the eye alone, we should say he was the most picturesque of poets. Read Shelley's description of his island retreat in *Epipsychidion*:

“It is an isle under Ionian skies,
Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise,
And, for the harbours are not safe and good,
This land would have remained a solitude
But for some pastoral people native there,
Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air,
Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,
Simple and spirited, innocent and bold.
The blue Ægean girds this chosen home
With ever-changing sound and light and foam,
Kissing the sifted sands, and caverns hoar;
And all the winds wandering along the shore
Undulate with the undulating tide:
There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide;
And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
As clear as elemental diamond,
Or serene morning air; and far beyond,
The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer
(Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year),
Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halls
Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls
Illumining, with sound that never fails,
Accompany the noonday nightingales;
And all the place is peopled with sweet airs;

The light, clear element, which the isle wears,
 Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
 Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,
 And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep ;
 And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
 And dart their arrowy odour through the brain,
 Till you might faint with that delicious pain,
 And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
 With that deep music is in unison ;
 Which is a soul within the soul—they seem
 Like echoes of an antenatal dream.
 It is an isle 'twixt heaven, air, earth, and sea,
 Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity ;
 Bright as that wandering Eden Lucifer,
 Washed by the soft blue oceans of young air."

This is very lovely; it gives us the impression of a most delicious spot, but we don't see *the* island: it has all that such an island as he seeks should have, but you are placed in possession of its beauties, not landed on the place itself. Contrast it with pure description in Tennyson, such as the opening of "Enone:"

"There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier
 Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.
 The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,
 Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,
 And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand
 The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down
 Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars
 The long brook falling through the clov'n ravine
 In cataract after cataract to the sea.
 Behind the valley topmost Gargarus
 Stands up and takes the morning; but in front
 The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal
 Troas and Ilion's column'd citadel,
 The crown of Troas."

Or, Sir Bedivere carrying the dying King Arthur to the lake:

"But as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
 Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
 When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
 Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!

I fear it is too late, and I shall die.
 But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
 Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
 Larger than human on the frozen hills.
 He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
 Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
 Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right
 The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
 And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
 And the long glories of the winter moon."

The two last lines place you on the very spot: you see it almost with your bodily eyes. And marvellous is the power with which he can strike off these landscapes at a blow. In the "Palace of Art" are a series of professed descriptions of pictures, each in four lines, and yet this brevity is consistent with giving an impression of absolute completeness of detail.

"One seem'd all dark and red—a tract of sand,
 And some one pacing there alone,
 Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,
 Lit with a low large moon.

One show'd an iron coast and angry waves.
 You seem'd to hear them climb and fall
 And roar rock-thwarted under bellowing caves,
 Beneath the windy wall.

And one, a full-fed river winding slow
 By herds upon an endless plain,
 The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
 With shadow-streaks of rain.

And one, the reapers at their sultry toil.
 In front they bound the sheaves. Behind
 Were realms of upland, prodigal in oil,
 And hoary to the wind.

And one, a foreground black with stones and slags,
 Beyond, a line of heights, and higher
 All barr'd with long white cloud the scornful crags,
 And highest, snow and fire.

And one, an English home—gray twilight pour'd
 On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
 Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
 A haunt of ancient Peace."

Tennyson never generalises. He gives us not aspects of nature, but some one special aspect at a given place and time: he never paints scenery, but always some individual scene. He assigns special conditions to every incident. One of our old poets has thus described the dawning of day:

"Now the day begins to break,
 And the light shoots like a streak
 Of subtle fire; the wind blows cold,
 While the morning doth unfold."

This might be anywhere. Not so with Tennyson.

"Till now the doubtful dusk reveal'd
 The knolls once more where, couch'd at ease,
 The white kine glimmer'd, and the trees
 Laid their dark arms about the field:

And suck'd from out the distant gloom,
 A breeze began to tremble o'er
 The large leaves of the sycamore,
 And fluctuate all the still perfume;

And gathering freshlier overhead,
 Rock'd the full-foliaged elms, and swung
 The heavy-folded rose, and flung
 The lilies to and fro, and said,

'The dawn, the dawn,' and died away;
 And East and West, without a breath,
 Mix'd their dim lights, like life and death,
 To broaden into boundless day."

Such a description of one of the changes from one state to another in Nature is rare in Tennyson. Usually in the natural as well as in the moral world, he prefers to paint things at rest. Some poets, Thomson for instance, occupy themselves rather with the natural changes, storms, the gathering of mists, the coming on of night, the falling of autumn leaves. The distinction is worth

noting, for it indicates a deep-seated difference in the whole character of their genius. Instances of the power to reproduce sounds are not of course so common, but not less striking. A single example will suffice.

“Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying ;
 Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.
 O hark, O hear ! how thin and clear,
 And thinner, clearer, farther going !
 O sweet and far from cliff and scar,
 The horns of Elfland faintly blowing !
 Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying ;
 Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.”

Byron, when dealing with scenery, gives you, with great force and spirit, the most ordinary commonplace impressions produced by it ; he intensifies the vague undiscerning glance with which we are apt to look at a perfectly new landscape. Wordsworth pierces to the deeper influences it has the power to exert, and reveals them to us. Tennyson gives it us as it is, and leaves it to make its own impression ; but he is master of what that impression shall be. He reproduces Nature with matchless freshness and fidelity. Yet he rarely copies her. He is not dependent on the actual combinations he has seen. His creative power intervenes here again. You can only describe its operation by contrasting it with the workings of a different genius. Wordsworth's mind is investigatory. All his lifetime he was gazing on Nature, and trying to penetrate her subtle and mysterious depths, observing and recording the impressions she produced on himself ; and the finest instances of his genius, and those which distinguish him from all others, are when, steeped himself to the core in the finest and profoundest of her influences, he can shadow forth in words the effect they produce. Wordsworth is the servant, the student, the worshipper of Nature ; he presses into her shrine. Tennyson is her master ; he controls, he wields her as an instrument. Wordsworth deciphers Nature ; Tennyson uses her to interpret himself. Words-

worth either tells us what he has gathered from her, or if he reproduce her, it is just as he has seen her; he describes an actual *existing* landscape. Tennyson *creates a new landscape* in such exquisite unison with his thought, that its power of arousing sentiment shall be the medium of expressing his thought with a delicacy nothing else could. He makes fresh scenery to match every change in his own mood. Wordsworth goes out to seek Nature. Tennyson is passive to her influences, simply recipient, not searchingly recipient like the other. He loves to "sit and let the sound of music creep in his ear." Wordsworth is haunted by a restless desire to put Nature down in verse as he sees it. Tennyson troubles himself not; but she sinks into the depths of his memory, and his musing spirit has ever at hand an unfailing wardrobe of loveliest forms; and rich vestments lie waiting by the pillow of his sleeping thoughts. When Tennyson has to describe the lotos-eaters, he does not go in quest of the most probable natural scenery, he does not give us the Nile with the red hills and ever-flowing stream, and pointed pyramids, with here a hippopotamus, and there a crocodile, and a vivid description of white waterlilies; he *makes* them a land to suit their condition.

"In the afternoon they came unto a land,
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flush'd: and, dew'd with showery drops,
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

The charmed sunset linger'd low adown
 In the red West : through mountain-clefts the dale
 Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
 Border'd with palm, and many a winding vale
 And meadow, set with slender galingale ;
 A land where all things always seem'd the same !
 And round about the keel with faces pale,
 Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
 The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came."

If he were a painter, we should say he had Claude's power of steeping a landscape with his own sentiment, combined with that absolute fidelity, which is the aim of our modern English landscape-painters.

Tennyson cannot be said to be a great master of rhythm. Verse is plastic in his hands : he can shape it with ease to his purposes, but he has none of that power by which Shakspeare wrote every play of a different class in a different rhythm. He indulges in experiments, without attaining to any very good new thing. Nothing can reconcile us to the dislocation of the old alternate rhyme which we find in the "In Memoriam" and elsewhere. It appears to have been adopted from pure desire for novelty, and we cannot help thinking the experiment a marked failure. Two rhymes are lost, and the other two clash too close on the ear. Such a collocation is only fitted for dissyllabic rhymes. It may do in Italian, but the English would have been wise, even in their sonnets, to follow the example Shakspeare set them. It will always remain a subject of regret, that the "In Memoriam" is defaced by the assumption of this unhappy form. Its inferiority is at once made apparent by comparing it with the proper alternate rhyme employed by the same poet, as in the "Palace of Art," the "Talking Oak," or "Lady Clare." Tennyson's verse, throughout, is not unfrequently spoiled by affectation and mannerism : that of "Maud" is often a mere butcher's-pony pace.

There is a harmony of sound in verse distinguishable from harmony of rhythm. Of this Tennyson is master.

He is master, too, of the finer capacities of words, and can make single lines infinitely expressive.

“Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.”

Any common poet would have written “tiréd,” but Tennyson will have it ti-erd (a legitimate English dissyllable), and your eyelids droop in saying it.

It is impossible to attempt any estimate of Tennyson's genius, without giving some consideration to his last effort. The reputation of his previous poems may be considered as fixed; they are incomparably the most popular of the day. Not read by so many as Eliza Cook's (whom probably many of our readers never heard of); not so deeply endeared to a few minds of a special order as Wordsworth's; but on the whole, those which afford the greatest delight and profit to the main body of competent English readers. The reputation of the poet, however, is in his own hands; for a man must be judged by the worst he is capable of, as well as by the best. Nor will it avail a poet who is once known and understood, to appeal from the judgment of his readers. Popular opinion is false enough in its transitory expressions; the plaudits accorded to Alexander Smith are valueless; the neglect suffered by Beddoes is inconclusive; but it can measure a man *against himself* pretty accurately. It is now pronouncing a very unmistakable judgment on the merits of Mr. Tennyson's last production. There may be some immediate exaggeration in the tone of the condemnation, yet we cannot doubt that in the main it will be confirmed by that ultimate public estimate, which is the voice neither of the loudest nor of the most numerous, but which sooner or later expresses what the men competent to think really do think,—the unbiassed and deliberate judgment of a man's peers. This beats like death at every gate, and strikes with as unsparing an arrow. More credit will probably, after a little time has

elapsed, be given for the beauties which "Maud" undoubtedly does contain ; yet it must always stand as a heavy item on the debtor side of his reputation account. No other man could have written it at all ; no one would have supposed that its author could have written it so ill. It abounds with scintillations of his genius, but the whole imaginative form is so confused and shapeless, the body of thought so valueless, and the execution on the whole so poor and degenerate, that his most earnest admirers must find it impossible to read it with pleasure. As to the main conception embodied in the poem, it is not easy to hazard an opinion, for it is almost impossible to ascertain what it really is. Had the whole been worthier in other respects, its leading idea might have repaid the labour of a disinterment ; as it is, it must be content to remain buried. The difficulty of the enigma is the only thing calculated to stimulate curiosity for its solution. A sulky and misanthropic young man's father may have been reduced to ruin and suicide by an old gray wolf residing in a neighbouring country-house ; the young man himself may reside in a cottage in a wood, and be subject to the petty depredations of his domestic servants ; he may form a reciprocated attachment for Maud, the daughter of the old wolf, and be annoyed by the haughty behaviour of her brother, the sultan of brutes, who wishes to marry her to a rabbit-faced peer. He may make verses to this lady (the best in the poem), and may spend the night in her garden conversing with the flowers, while she is dancing at a ball inside ; till, in one of the poet's happy imitative couplets,

"Low on the sand, and loud on the stone,
The last wheel echoes away."

She may then come to see him at the gate ; be followed by her brother, who may strike our morbid young friend, who may make a hole in his side in a duel, whether with fatal consequences we can't say. Maud may disappear

from the story, except in an apparitional form. The hero may go to Boulogne, haunted by an ocular delusion; crack a small shell on the shore, and return; be buried very near the surface of a London street; rise again, see Maud descend in a vision and foretell the coming war; may join the people in a battle-cry on board a ship-of-the-line, and "wake to the higher aims of a land that has lost for a little her lust of gold." All this may be done, and leave us little the wiser. It may be an allegory—which is the severest construction that can be put upon it—or it may be an ill-told love-story, full of brief snatches of wonderful beauty, which the poet has clumsily made the vehicle of some of his own views on the question of peace and war.

Apart from the artistic demerits of the poem, we could have wished that this subject had been handled more broadly and more temperately. This used not to be Tennyson's deficiency. The three poems in his first volume, "You ask me why," "Of old sat Freedom on the Heights," and "Love thou thy Land," are treasures of that wisdom with which a poet should enlarge the practice-enthralled aims and views of statesmen. Must we send him to school in his mature age, to learn from himself the lessons he taught in his college days, of "Freedom"

"Turning to scorn with lips divine
The falsehood of extremes"?

Must we warn him to

"Pamper not a hasty time,
Nor feed with crude imaginings
The herd, wild hearts and feeble wings,
That every sophister can lime"?

Has he so utterly forgotten that

"Gentle words are always gain"?

The blind raving against peace in "Maud" *may* be only dramatic, but it is in such a form as not to be dis-

tinguishable by any one from the approved sentiments of the author, and is a poor contribution from the great popular poet of his day, to a cause which demands the greatest strength and most persistent resolution of which England is capable, standing as she does the harassed upholder of a difficult cause, between a powerful foe and a distrusted and incompetent guidance. It is true, no doubt, that war in itself has a value ; that the more constant opportunities and examples of self-sacrifice it offers do tend to rouse a more chivalrous sentiment in a nation, and oppose themselves to the indolence and self-indulgence with which peace is compatible ; and that a great common cause unites in a wider interest the petty isolations of commercial life. A great poet might glance at these things ; but to look so exclusively at them, is to turn from the true object, to hug ourselves on the advantages we may obtain from the means ; it is but another form of selfishness.

Tennyson gives an exaggerated expression to the mere war-spirit, and no prominence to the cause and principles involved, which alone can make war a duty and a blessing. In so doing he is echoing back and furthering one of the worst evils of a war—the danger that it should be loved for its own sake ; an evil only less than that of passing by great duties, and sacrificing great interests, for the mere dread of the sufferings it brings, and from a cowardly and interested regard for peace. Those whose sympathies are the most steadily and seriously engaged in the prosecution of the war, and who revolt the most strongly from a shameful and impotent conclusion to it, ought to be the first to protest against the language of an auxiliary, however powerful, whose rash and unsustainable vituperation of the mere state of peace must inevitably cast some slur on the cause he espouses. Tennyson has forgotten his old promise to himself,—

“I will not cramp my heart, nor take
Half views of men or things.”

It is only in some of its details that "Maud" has any claim on our attention. It is full of fragments of wonderful beauty, often inseparably mixed up, in the most irritating manner, with flimsy matter in jingling verse.

The stately and moving "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," and the "Charge of the Light Brigade," are reprinted in this last volume. The latter is only spirited. The former we can never read too often, and we turn gratefully from the painful waste of genius which torments us in "Maud," to the temperate flow of lordly verse, the wisdom of thought, and the lucidity of expression, which make this Ode incomparably the finest work of art that any Poet Laureate has ever produced in discharge of the functions of his office. Sometimes we are inclined to think that, in this sort of subject, Mr. Tennyson has no independent power of origination; but is simply an involuntary focus, which collects into a shining point the existing condition of national feeling and thought; and that "Maud" is the image of our present perplexities, as the Ode is that of the common deep feeling and general current of reflection, aroused by the death of the Duke. This volume contains, moreover, one or two small poems, sufficient to indicate that in the domain of tranquil fancy Tennyson's powers remain little impaired.

What more are we to look for from Mr. Tennyson? "Maud" itself does not seem to indicate that his command over language and fancy is in the least contracted; it has no trace of the relaxed nerves of age, not even of that diminished boldness of imagination and vividness of fancy, which in general detract from the advantages of matured judgment and taste in a poet. Its faults are rawness and incoherence; it is just the poem which would have excited brilliant hopes for the poetical career of a boy of nineteen. It is the more lamentable that so great a poet should, in the unweakened vigour of his powers, want only those advantages which his own will could have secured him; that one whom Nature has so lavishly

endowed should be content to serve as a new example that severe and persevering efforts are necessary to the progress of a poet,—necessary even to guard against sudden and rapid retrogression. The poet is born, not made : but this is all that Nature does for him. Suddenly the saying is reversed. He does not grow ; he must build up himself. Nature graces her young athlete with swiftness and strength ; she brings him to the starting-place, she strips and anoints him ; but it is for him to run the race : the mere rejoicing in his faculties, effortless spurning of the dust, may carry him some way along the course ; but not without toiling and sweat is the grasping of the crown. So her gifts to the poet—a fertile fancy, a passionateness, or, in its place, an intensity of nature, swift imagination, and piercing vision—are but the instruments of the success he is to win for himself. They may flash with a brilliant heaven-aspiring pyramid of fire, to sink with swift decadence and play in feeble glimmerings, like fitful false auroras, or they may rise in full and glorious advance like the sun, from the morning to the mid-day, till

“ All the earth and air
With the song is loud.”

Keats was more richly endowed by nature with the special temperament, and some of the most important gifts of a poet, than any other modern writer. He was cut off when he had but shaken his young sword in the freshness and exultation of his strength, and he left it a perfectly open question, whether he could ever have fought his way to great things, or would have idly flourished the bright weapon till it rusted in his hand. What would have been Shelley's career, on the other hand, no one can doubt ;—partly because he lived longer ;—but his face was ever up the mountain, his nature softening and refining, his intellect broadening, and his imagination growing more searching and comprehensive, as, day by day, his unwearied shining sickle reaped the ever-springing golden

harvest of beauty. Of him we may aver, safely, that had he lived, he would have ranked high—perhaps only second among the poets of England. Wordsworth, from a soil not naturally rich, gathered by patient and indefatigable spade-husbandry a noble and abundant crop. In him culture was carried something too far, or at least was too anxiously pursued, until it even took a taint of egotism, and wanted a perpetual discrimination, which should not have left the tares to ripen with the wheat, to the unbounded annoyance of the purchaser of six volumes.

Is Mr. Tennyson to stand as the instance of as disproportioned a neglect? We earnestly trust that the truer view is, that "Maud" indicates only some sudden and passing perversion of taste and judgment; that it is the symptom of an acute seizure, not of a chronic failing; and that one to whom the English language is already so deeply indebted, has still the power and the will to add some things worthy of his genius and his fame.

THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL OF ENGLISH POETRY:

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

I. MINOR POEMS.*

[Feb. 1854.]

MR. ARNOLD'S book will give genuine pleasure to every one whose judgment it is worth a man's while to consider. He measures himself, indeed, too justly to claim a place among the kings of song; but below the topmost heights of Parnassus lie many pleasant ranges and happy pastures, among whose denizens he may enjoy a not ignoble rank. He starts from a vantage-ground rare in these days. He possesses the uncommon and valuable conviction that poetic art has its nature and its rules, which admit of being studied with advantage. Nor does he want the more intrinsic attributes of a poet. A keen and refined sense of beauty, sometimes finding its expression in phrases of exquisite felicity, a mind and artistic faculty trained and disciplined to reticence, and an imagination of considerable scope and power, are no mean qualifications.

One of the few observations worth noting (if it be worth noting) in that strangely barren work, the *Life and Letters of Byron*, is one in which his lordship maintains that there are qualities in poetry closely corresponding with those which distinguish the gentleman in life; and that the same sort of vulgarity may be found in the false assumptions of art as in those of the world. Now Mr. Arnold's are eminently the poems of a gentle-

* *Poems.* By A. Two Series. Fellowes.

Poems. By Matthew Arnold. A new edition. Longmans.

man ; and what is perhaps part of this characteristic, they are thoroughly genuine and sincere ; the author is always himself and not a pretence at any one else ; there is no affectation, no strained effort, no borrowed plumage ; he presents himself without disguise and without false shame ; is dignified, simple, and self-restrained. If not always profound, at least he does not affect profundity ; his strokes bring his thought or sentiment out clear and decisive ; he is never guilty of false show and glitter ; and those who have read some of our modern poets will recognise the inestimable comfort of not having to press through an umbrageous forest of verbiage and heterogeneous metaphors in order to get at a thin thought concealed in its centre. There is artistic finish too in his verse (though, as we wish hereafter to remark, not in his conceptions) ; not the finish of high polish, but the refined ease and grace of a taste pure by nature and yet conscientiously cultivated. Hence, instead of congratulating ourselves that we have read him, we find a pleasure in actually reading him, and take him up again and again with undiminished freshness and enjoyment. Partly it is, that he does not make too great a demand upon us ; his light free air refreshes us. Instead of being hemmed in by that majesty and terror which make the vicinity of the Alps oppressive, we stroll with lighter hearts on breezy heaths and uplands. Like Wordsworth, Mr. Arnold owes part of his charm to the very absence of deep and engrossing feelings in his nature.

A considerable portion of these poems are self-descriptive, or more properly, self-betraying. These owe their interest chiefly to any fresh indication they may afford us of the tone of feeling and mode of thought prevalent among some of our recent Oxford scholars. Mr. Arnold will perhaps be startled to hear that he belongs to an unchristian school ; but we hasten to assure him that by saying this we do not mean to charge him with a limited faith in the eternity of punishment, or with

nourishing views of his own on baptismal regeneration, or even declining to rest implicit confidence on the verbal inspiration of the Bible. We don't feel it to be our duty, in the phrase of angry brother clergymen, to give him an opportunity of explaining his views on these or any similar and equally important links in the orthodox manacles. We are indifferent as to whether he over-balances himself towards faith or towards works, and not anxious to inquire into his exact place among the three subdivisions of the three main classes of the "Edinburgh classification." We are looking at the matter from the reverse point of view from that gentleman who said, *Newman on the Soul* was a horribly atheistic book, but that Thomas Carlyle's works contained nothing contrary to sound Christian doctrine.

Probably, however, an error in dogmatic convictions can alone entitle us to call a man unchristian in his views; and that it would be more correct to say that Mr. Arnold is of a *non-christian* school. "Oh, how shocking!" exclaimed a lady on hearing a certain sonnet of Wordsworth's read aloud; "he'd rather be a pagan!" And so Mr. Arnold (or his Muse, for it is with the poet, not the man, we deal) prefers to be a pagan. In art the Greek is his model; and happily has he sometimes caught the clear Attic note. He is not a modern Greek like Shelley, nor an imitative scholar; but he has familiarised himself with Athenian poetry until the echo rings in his ears; and though when he is most himself he is least Greek, he often, both in form and expression, moulds himself, half consciously and half unconsciously, upon the impressions with which his mind is saturated. One might choose something more exactly in point than the following, but nothing more beautiful:

"Through the black, rushing smoke-bursts,
Thick breaks the red flame.
All Etna heaves fiercely
Her forest-cloth'd frame.

Not here, O Apollo !
Are haunts meet for thee,
But where Helicon breaks down
In cliff to the sea.

Where the moon-silver'd inlets
Send far their light voice
Up the still vale of Thisbe,
O, speed, and rejoice !

On the sward, at the cliff-top,
Lie strewn the white flocks ;
On the cliff-side the pigeons
Roost deep in the rocks.

In the moonlight the shepherds,
Soft lull'd by the rills,
Lie wrapt in their blankets,
Asleep on the hills.

—What forms are these coming
So white through the gloom ?
What garments out-glistening
The gold-flower'd broom ?

What sweet-breathing Presence
Out-perfumes the thyme ?
What voices enrapture
The night's balmy prime ?—

'Tis Apollo comes leading
His choir, The Nine.

—The Leader is fairest,
But all are divine.

They are lost in the hollows.
They stream up again.
What seeks on this mountain
The glorified train ?—

They bathe on this mountain,
In the spring by their road.
Then on to Olympus,
Their endless abode.

—Whose praise do they mention ?
Of what is it told ?—
What will be for ever,
What was from of old.

First hymn they the Father
Of all things ; and then
The rest of Immortals,
The action of men.

The Day in its hotness,
The strife with the palm ;
The Night in its silence,
The Stars in their calm."

But though in his art Mr. Arnold is Greek, the thought and general feeling of his pieces are tinged with a more modern heathenism.

The greatest intellect of modern times cannot but have had an influence on modern thought, even in the English Universities. There is nothing about Goethe in the Articles of the Church of England, and undergraduates at Oxford may read him with impunity. His philosophy and his practice have found echoes—confused and uncertain enough—but still easily recognisable in many English, even many Oxford, minds. We don't allude to his pantheistic tenets ; for no sworn member of our English Church can be infected with these ; but to his Philosophy of Life—the philosophy which says life is the art of self-development, and claims that we should devote ourselves to conscious self-formation without ulterior object, which would have the nature of a man revolve on its own axis, and treats religion as a step in education, and not the highest step. This is the philosophy which lies hidden in the centre of many an English mind ; and it has received an impulse from a very different and less generally suspected quarter. Where Goethe stepped with conscious searching eyes, the mild egotism of Wordsworth led him without thought or clear perception of his whereabouts. His self-occupation was too simple and complete for him to be conscious of it. It was quiet, inoffensive, and unlimited. The most important thing in the world was the cultivation of William Wordsworth for himself, the next important thing his cultivation for the sake of

mankind. Goethe puts quietly on one side that central spirit of the Christian revelation which makes the dependent affections the highest element in our nature, and which places our noblest attainable life in that service which is perfect freedom. He would have us all patent-digesters, or rather assimilators, of knowledge and experience ; and, indeed, his vast ranging genius and cold temperament made him, if any man, capable of the independent position he assumes. But feebler minds that strive to hold this place are constantly and painfully reminded of their own insufficiency. They "stretch weak hands," not "of faith and prayer," but of the self-distrust begotten by frequent failure, and of the dismay and heart-sinking that arise from finding that their steps are not right onward to the proposed goal, but wavering, sliding, too often retrogressive. Their affections, whether strong or weak, outbalance their will : they suffer from all the shortcomings of their philosophy, and have not the heart to avail themselves of its consolations, such as they are. Goethe, as Mr. Arnold himself says in one of his finest poems,

"Was happy, if to know
Causes of things, and far below
His feet to see the lurid flow
Of terror and insane distress,
And headlong fate, be happiness."

But to few is it given to taste such happiness. Few have the will and fewer yet the power to sever those threads which knit them up in the common bond of humanity. Some cold tempers there are which can stand aloof and quietly survey the field of circumstance. They quarrel neither with their own shortcomings nor with those of others ; all that is, is if not well, at least not to be helped ; they are indifferentists, calm and apathetic ruminators. They lie down in life and chew the cud of destiny. They have opinions ; but whether they are true, they don't know ; nor does it much signify ; things must take their course.

They are phenomena, and content to be phenomena ; and they rarely harass themselves with any stronger feeling than that of a gentle contempt for others. Mr. Arnold is far from being of this class ; his nature is too genial to permit it ; but he is touched with the barren doctrine that it is a man's business to be investigating and following the " Law of his being," and that therein lies his road to rest and happiness ; he yearns to walk by sight, and kneels idolatrously to wisdom, and sings of Fate and " Unknown Powers" that control the destiny of man ; but in such wavering strains, and mixed sometimes with thoughts so much higher, that it is not easy to estimate what real hold the Oxford sublimates of Goethe has upon his mind. Like others of his school, weary of the internecine war of self, his troubled eyes turn to Nature, and he sees in the calm routine of physical Nature something that contrasts so peacefully with the jar of his own endeavours, that he not only seeks the soothing balm of loveliness and freshness that she pours into our wounds, but he gives a moral significance to her invariable round of operations, and personifies her as the ideal of voluntary obedience to the law. So vivid is his personification, and so warm his reverence, that it far outpasses the limits of our sympathy and admiration.

" Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be,
At the vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forwards, forwards, o'er the starlit sea.

And a look of passionate desire
O'er the sea and to the stars I send :
' Ye who from my feeble childhood up have calm'd me,
Calm me, ah, compose me to the end.

Ah, once more,' I cried, ' ye Stars, ye Waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew :
Still, still let me, as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you.'

From the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven,
 Over the lit sea's unquiet way,
 In the rustling night-air came the answer—
 'Wouldst thou *be* as these are? *Live* as they.

Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
 Undistracted by the sights they see,
 These demand not that the things without them
 Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

And with joy the stars perform their shining,
 And the sea its long moon-silver'd roll.
 For alone they live, nor pine with noting
 All the fever of some differing soul.

Bounded by themselves, and unobservant
 In what state God's other works may be,
 In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
 These attain the mighty life you see.'

O air-born Voice! long since, severely clear
 A cry like thine in my own heart I hear.
 'Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he
 Who finds himself, loses his misery.'"

Perhaps it is hardly fair to quarrel so much with Mr. Arnold's personal philosophy, when his poetry is so much better. He brings this sort of observation on himself, however, by inflicting so much of the subject-matter of it upon his readers. His pages are crowded with this sort of poem, when he has it in his power to write others infinitely superior to them. He must pardon us for saying that his philosophy and meditations on life are scarcely valuable enough, to make a poetry employed in developing them capable of deeply moving and widely profiting the public mind. Again, the intricacies of his intercourse with Marguerite are certainly not good love-poems, and rarely any thing better; and his mourning notes over the perplexities and distracting influences thrust upon the heart and mind in this

"Strange disease of modern life,
 With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
 Its head o'er-tasked, its palsied heart—"

are apt to degenerate into mere bewailments. It is the part of a true and manly poet to raise us above these troubles. We seek him, not to be reminded of our shortcomings and imbecilities, but to be lifted into a clearer air, which may revive our spirit and purge our eyesight for a new and more vigorous contest in the dusty plain. And Mr. Arnold can do this for us if he will. His fine, often exquisite sense of beauty, his power of felicitous narration, his command over varied sentiment and feeling (he has not attempted the delineation of violent passion), open a field to him where he might occupy not only a high place, but one peculiarly his own. Wordsworth and Tennyson have both left a tinge of their peculiar characteristics in the fountain of Mr. Arnold's poetry, and there is something very charming in having poems analogous to the short narrative or descriptive pieces in which Tennyson so often revels, less gorgeous and rich in their beauty, but at the same time less turbid and sensuous, and purified by something of the quieter insight and higher refinement of Wordsworth. They are like Greek wine mingled with water for a draught. In saying this, we might convey a false impression, if we did not add that Mr. Arnold is no mere compound; every thing he writes is perfectly his own; he has no trace of a copyist, his genius is truly original and individual, and the resemblances we advert to are, partly, only the legitimate and perfectly assimilated influences of minds with which he has come in contact, and yet more, perhaps, the traces of other influences so widely and subtilly dispersed that they may be called epidemic.

"Tristram and Iseult" is by far the most pleasing of these *quasi* narrative poems, and, on the whole, the best thing in these volumes. "Sohrab and Rustum" is a fine poem, but less to our taste. Mr. Arnold's forte is description, but here there is a little too much of it. The poem is too long for the action: but throughout the diction is stately and sustained, and the ornament and

imagery rich, and in keeping with it. Yet it interests us more by the mode of its narration and its decorations, than by the inner kernel of sentiment and action. It is more like a fine carving than a good picture. One merit it has which is very rarely to be found in its author. It is conceived as a whole and executed as a whole, a poem—not a piece of joinery. We wish Mr. Arnold could be prevailed on to bestow more pains on some of the main requisites of his art. If he would read his own preface with attention, he might profit by some excellent observations contained in it. No man ever insisted more strongly on the excellence of wholeness and of a due subordination of details to the main composition, on the importance of the choice of a subject and the careful construction of the poem; few men have ever more systematically disregarded their own preaching. It is the one great and prominent defect of these poems that they give the reader no satisfaction as poems, but only scattered rays of enjoyment. Mr. Arnold's conceptions want force and unity; what is worse, they sometimes want substance. His minor poems especially, even when delighting us most, are apt to leave us with a sense of shortcoming, arising from the want of unity in their thought, or some hidden weakness in their conclusion. They are full of flaws. Take the following poem for an example:

“Yes; in the sea of life enisl'd,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.

The islands feel the enclaspings flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights,
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens on starry nights
The nightingales divinely sing,
And lovely notes from shore to shore
Across the sounds and channels pour;

Oh, then a longing like despair,
 Is to their farthest caverns sent ;
 —For surely once, they feel, we were
 Parts of a single continent.
 Now round us spreads the watery plain—
 Oh, might our margins meet again !

Who order'd that their longing's fire
 Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd ?
 Who renders vain their deep desire ?
 A God, a God their severance rul'd ;
 And bade betwixt their shores to be
 The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea."

The main sentiment and the expression none will deny to possess beauty, but how abortive the conclusion ! To have our expectations raised by the queries in the last verse, and then to be put off with an indefinite deity repeated twice over, as if that solved the whole matter—this is a little too trying ; not all the significance and rich cadence of the one last line can restore our equanimity. Again, in "Tristram and Iseult," it is wonderful how Mr. Arnold's sense of completeness could fail him so utterly as to allow him to conclude with a totally new and disconnected story lying at a tangent to the circle of his original one.

Hazlitt, speaking of painting, says that the "English school is distinguished by what are called *ébauches*, rude, violent attempts at effect, and a total inattention to the details or delicacy of finish." This is applicable to modern English poetry, and Mr. Arnold has done good service by the practical protest that his own poems afford against this hasty glaring style. He has both delicacy and purity of finish, and this is one thing which makes his book such agreeable reading. In this respect his classical education and tastes have stood him in good stead ; and it is disappointing to find them exercising so disproportionately small an influence over the form of his conceptions and the choice of his subjects.

So fully is Mr. Arnold himself aware of the import-

ance of this latter point, that he has excluded one of his larger poems from the last edition on the ground that the situation embodied in it is one from which no poetical enjoyment can be derived. Apropos of this, and of some difference with his critics, as to the field afforded by ancient subjects for the exercise of modern art, he has written a preface in which he develops a theory of poetry, defends the ancients as models for the artist, and rebukes the false pretensions of the age and of his own critics—but distantly and politely. He is a little sore; but he keeps a steady countenance. “Non me tua turbida terrent dicta,” he says; “Dii me terrent et Jupiter hostis.” He is not afraid of them. We have as little respect for the critics as Mr. Arnold, perhaps less, and are quite at one with him as to the false pretensions of the present age; so we will confine ourselves to a few words upon the earlier part of his preface.

Here again it is the leading idea which appears to be defective, while the subordinate observations are many of them extremely just and valuable. His love for the Athenian Drama has misled Mr. Arnold. He has rightly pointed out its most prominent feature when he says that it delineates great *actions*. But he goes on to tell us that great actions can alone afford the subject-matter for excellent poetry. This is not so. It is the main defect of the Greek tragic art, the measure of its shortcoming, that it advanced thus far and no farther; that in its development it rigidly subordinated every thing to the delineation of some great action. This Mr. Arnold thinks its highest glory. He quotes Aristotle (as conclusively as a lawyer does Coke upon Littleton), to prove that our love of poetry is based on the pleasure we take in any imitation or representation whatever; a poetical representation, however, he says, must be one from which men can derive enjoyment, for Hesiod says that the Muses were born that they might be “a forgetfulness of evils, and a truce from cares;” and Schiller says that “All art

is dedicated to joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem than how to make men happy." Thus it is required of the poet, that he should add not only to the knowledge but also to the happiness of men. The eternal objects of poetry, among all nations and at all times, Mr. Arnold goes on to say, are human actions. Hence the highest poetry concerns itself with the selection of such actions as in their delineation shall give the highest pleasure. Now all this appears to us narrow and false. It is a limitation necessarily required indeed, if we are to give the highest place in the history of poetic art to the Greek drama, but not otherwise. Without venturing to contradict Aristotle, we may certainly say that the poetic art is not limited to the representation of human actions, in however wide a sense we may employ the term. We have poems to the Lesser Celandine, to a Mouse, to the Skylark—nay, we have abundance of pieces which involve no picture of any thought or sentiment of the poet himself, but are purely descriptive of natural objects. Will it be said that the action here delineated is that of the poet in delineating? This is as if we should say the picture of a flower was the picture of the artist painting it; and, at any rate, we should then have in a poem whose subject is an action in the ordinary sense—two actions delineated, one the operation of the artist, the other the action he has chosen for his subject, and it is the latter alone with which we are now dealing. And an action is not only not the sole, it is not the highest, subject of the poetic art. Man is higher than his actions, and it is in the representation of the whole man that the romantic drama soars far beyond its classical rival. In Sophocles the action is predominant, and the characters are interesting as they elucidate it. In Shakspeare the characters are predominant, and the events gain their main interest from the insight which, by their aid, the poet contrives to give us into some human heart. Types of passion and sentiment suf-

fice for the Greek, he clothes abstractions in broad if not life-like outlines; but the Englishman must represent the varied forms which these same passions and sentiments assume in given individual men. There is no doubt that the easiest and most effective mode by which the poetic art can interest men, is through the sympathy of the passions, and that these can only be displayed in some action; but this is not the highest interest that art can afford. On the stage, and for some time even in the closet, it is some special scene that interests us in a great play, some crisis in the action—Lear howling to the winds, or Macbeth towards his design creeping like a ghost; but the more cultivated our taste, and the more intimate our knowledge of the work, the more does our interest centre upon the whole character, and it is the vivid images of the represented men and women—the noble credulous Moor—the keen crafty Richard—it is Imogen, Juliet, Hamlet, who live in our hearts and memories, and afford the highest pleasure that art is capable of yielding. We thoroughly coincide with Mr. Arnold in his criticism on Shakspeare, and in the necessity of the due subordination of expression to the perfecting of the main conception. But we should scarcely acquiesce in the grounds on which he bases his dicta. Let poetry be what it will, it is valuable to draw a distinction between it and art. Poetry creates, art moulds these creations into the highest forms of which they are capable. The poet moves from an instinctive impulse *quâ* poet; *quâ* artist he employs this impulse for a remoter purpose. It is art, to quote Mr. Arnold's quotation from Goethe, which is "*Architectonicè* in the highest sense." A man may be a greater poet than artist—Shakspeare was such a one; he may be a far greater artist than poet, such was Goethe. In all this Mr. Arnold agrees; indeed, he says almost the same thing; but he makes the attainment of pleasure the highest test of art, and, what makes the matter of interest here, uses it for the

education of practical consequences. This is to introduce the doctrines of utilitarianism, exploded from the field of morals, into that of æsthetics. True art never fails to bring enjoyment, as good morals never fail to bring happiness; but the artist is going as far wrong as the moralist, if he makes the enjoyment his work is calculated to afford to others the test and object of his labours. Art seeks the highest, and the rules that lead to the highest admit of no such simple and narrow gauge.

As to the choice of ancient subjects, we will only just say that, quite acquiescing in the poverty and groundless assumption of the doctrine which would limit the poet to modern interests, it is yet true that the points on which we can touch the ancient world with sufficient closeness to embody in art the materials it affords, are few, and require much tact and skill in the avoidance of the Scylla and Charybdis which beset them—the danger, on the one hand, of making them hybrid and untruthful, by the admixture of modern ideas, and that, on the other, of finding them too remote not only from the interests of the reader, but, what is more important, from the sympathies of the poet himself. More than this, the higher you go in art, the fewer are these points of contact. Restrict yourself to great actions and single exhibitions of the “permanent passions,” and the task is less difficult; but to delineate a complex individual character as it existed in ancient Egypt, would be hard, to say the least of it. “Mycerinus,” we confess, falls dead on our ears.

THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL OF ENGLISH POETRY:

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

II.—MEROPE: A TRAGEDY.*

[April 1858.]

MR. ARNOLD is no doubt following his own true bent when he devotes himself to what is called the classical school of literature. Certainly no living poet is so well qualified to familiarise the English mind (if that be possible) with the forms and substance of the Greek drama. The limits, as well as the quality, of his genius give him more than common facilities for such a task. His love of beauty is profound, and he loves best, perhaps by nature, and certainly from study, its more abstract manifestations, especially those of form. He uses the emotions as a field for the intellect, not the mind to subserve the heart, and his imagination is bound up with the former rather than the latter; it is a lamp that shines, not a fire that glows. He lays a cold hand on sensuous imagery; and there is a keen clear atmosphere about his pictures from nature, as if his muse had steeped his eyes in Attic air and sunshine. Thus gifted, he devotes himself to reproducing Greek poetry in an English dress, and presents us with an Athenian tragedy in our own language. We are not ungrateful for the gift. But Mr. Arnold is not content that we should accept it as a beautiful curiosity, or treat it as a rare exotic: he has written a preface to urge that such plants should be acclimatised; he boldly demands place in English literature for the forms of poetry which took their

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rise in Greek sacrificial observances, adapted themselves to Greek social habits, were limited by Greek ideas, and embodied Greek religion, Greek patriotism, and, above all, that which is most characteristic of a people,—the feelings with which it looks at the hidden arbiters of life, the controlling destinies of the world. That drama, which held these things as a wine holds its flavour and spirit, Mr. Arnold thinks should be studied in England ; not studied to know it, that we may rejoice in it and the knowledge it brings with it, but studied to reproduce it, that we may make the same kind of thing for ourselves. He thinks he can dig up the dusky olive from the plains of Attica, and plant it in our English wheat-fields ; that he can take in its fullest development the most purely indigenous and the most intensely and narrowly national literature the world ever saw, and bid it find new springs of life some two thousand years later in a nation which has already found its expression in a dramatic literature evolved by itself. Did such an attempt ever succeed ? A native literature in its infancy may take the impression of a foreign one ; though even then, if it have strength to grow at all, it soon throws off, or carries only as a superficies, the marks of its early tutoring : but when did a foreign growth ever share the field with an indigenous one ? A nation whose habits of thought were sufficiently congruous with those of some other, has plagiarised and adapted its literary productions : Terence went to Greece as Planché goes to Paris. But in these cases it is not a foreign form and spirit which is transferred, but the adapter merely consults his own idleness, or the poverty of his own resources, by borrowing a plot and a certain stock of wit and ideas ; and his effort is to oust all that is specially foreign, or to transform it into a more familiar shape.

Is the epic a Greek form naturalised ? It may be so ; the particular form of the *Iliad* has been adopted in great measure as the model of all epics : but it is a form so

broad and simple, has in it so little that is special or national, that it may be said to be a mode of embodying imaginative ideas common to all mankind. It is a form which is easily separable from the matter, and it is the form alone which has been borrowed. No great poet has ever written another Greek epic. We shall not be confuted by Glover's *Leonidas*. Every one has emptied out the old form, and filled it with his own native ideas. The *Eneid* is Roman; the *Inferno* is Florentine; the *Paradise Lost* is English. In the same way, Jonson in England and Molière in France adhered more or less strictly to the rules deduced by the critics as the true conditions of comedy; but applied them to modern manners, modern character, and all the wider range and greater richness, intricacy, and variety of modern ideas. When we speak of form, we are apt to confound two things. There is a form which is one with its spirit, and is its outer manifestation; there is another which is merely a sort of outside shell. It is this alone perhaps which in art one century or one nation *can* borrow from another; certainly it is this alone which we have taken in the epic, and in some of the broad rules which govern our dramatic constructions.

But there is what is called the classical school of tragedy. Is this what we have professed to think impossible,—a new birth of an art which rose like a star so many centuries ago, and after its brief but imperishable shining, fell headlong again into silence? Have France and Italy revived the Athenian stage? Mr. Arnold claims, and claims justly, for the tragedy of Athens, that though wanting in the richness of that of England, it has not only power and intensity, but speaks strongly to the highest artistic feelings in our nature, because it is steeped as it were, thoroughly interpenetrated, by a rhythmic proportion and correspondence which governs its spirit as well as its outer form. Has either the greatness of its matter, or the beauty of its forms, been preserved by

Alfieri, or Racine, or Addison, men of no despicable genius? The Greek tragedy is not narrow for ancient Greece; that is to say, it occupies itself with the full field of Greek tragic thought: but the modern classical school is narrow. It has sought intensity by exclusion and limitation; it deepens the river, not by an abundance of waters, but by narrowing in the banks. Æschylus rolls along with a sound of great waters. Racine lashes a canal into foam. The peculiarities of form and the choice of subjects, which were natural and indispensable to Greek art, serve only as devices to countenance the poverty of that of France. The ancient tales are stripped bare, necessarily so, of the hallowed associations of religion and patriotism and ancestral piety which clung to them in Greece, and remain naked exhibitions of human passion. Sophocles gives us the deep-seated workings of the hearts of men, and the terrible and inscrutable mysteries of mortal destiny, set to solemn music, clear and penetrating in its tones, if not rich in its harmony; like Milton's scathed angels, moving

"In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood
Of flutes and soft recorders."

But his field embraces more than this. It is not the vagaries and struggling passions of the simple human heart that inspire his tragedies, but of hearts which are the field of action for the dread supernatural powers,—hearts which are swayed from their nature by divine wills, which bear the burden of ancestral crimes, and embody the destinies of nations. But you cannot have this in modern plays. When Racine's *Phèdre* ascribes the fierce flames of her unlawful desires to the anger of Venus, and tells of her vain sacrifices on the altar of the goddess, the extenuation, which must have raised something of sublime pity in a Greek heart, falls dead and unmeaning on our ears; it seems trivial, a sort of classical decoration, which interferes with our interest, if it affects us at all. *Phèdre*

does indeed agitate us powerfully, because our attention undistracted is tied down to the contemplation of a single frantic passion and a woman writhing under its torturing influence : it is not a play to be seen from a distance, or that could be acted in mask or buskin ; but it needs an audience who can catch each altered tone and every change of feature, and calls for the heart-piercing cries, the working features, the pale flashes and spasmodic action of Rachel. French tragedy screams through all its monotonous cadence, its stilted diction, and its formal limitations of time and place and persons. The same in great measure is true of Alfieri, in whom, however, speaks, if not a higher genius, a stronger and more ardent nature. "Narrow elevation," says Mr. Arnold, "is the characteristic of Alfieri." Perhaps we should rather say narrow intensity ; and one or the other is the highest tragic characteristic of the modern classical drama. Nor is the form of the Greek drama more clearly reproduced than its matter. Mr. Arnold well describes the influence and beauties of the Athenian choruses ; their interpretative and enforcing functions ; the repose that lyric song affords to the strained emotions ; and the balanced rhythmic symmetry which their answering parts give to the whole play. But the French school dispenses with this characteristic feature ; or uses it, if at all, stripped of what makes it most characteristic. In brief, the modern classical drama has borrowed not the form but the mere shell of that of Greece, and even that narrowed and angularised ; and though it has preserved a set of classical ideas to which it appeals, and a sort of classical phraseology which it uses, these are conventional and external only. There is this marked difference between the influence of ancient literature on the modern literature of England and of France, that in the former, ideas and forms, so far as they were adopted at all, were digested and assimilated ; in the latter they were simply employed to overlay and varnish : there was no native growth to swallow them up

and be enriched by them ; they were greater in every way than that with which they came in contact, and were cruelly hacked and compressed to meet its meaner requirements. Mr. Arnold is fully aware of this ; but he makes some confusion : he uses the term ‘classical school,’ but what he really means by the term is the school of ancient Greece itself. He sees, or feels rather, that you cannot adopt its special and intricate beauty of form without adopting something of its inner essence ; and when he enters the lists as a writer in this school, he writes something not like the *Cato* of Addison, or the *Irene* of Johnson, but as like as he can to

“The mellow glory of the Attic stage,
Singer of sweet Colonus and its child.”

But the true ancient drama, which could not strike root in France or Italy, can still less hope to do so in England. In architecture, we have done much as the French did in poetry,—we have introduced and used freely a dwarfed and conventional classical school. We have also built occasional specimens more or less true to the real Greek types ; but these latter stand, and must ever stand, as curiosities. We cannot live in Greek houses, nor worship in Greek temples. Vain is Mr. Arnold’s hope to see an English literature “enriched,” as he expresses it, “with the forms of the most perfectly formed literature in the world.” As well might he bid us retrieve the discipline of Sparta, or replant the “groves of Academe.” When we have rebuilt the Greek theatres, it will be time to reintroduce the Greek drama.

But this is no reason why Mr. Arnold should not, if he pleases, write a Greek play. Such an exercise, involving as it does a close and minute study of the details of ancient masterpieces, may be of infinite value to the poet’s self, cannot be read (at least if done as well as it is here done) without interest by educated men ; and it may possibly exercise a wider influence. It is professedly

an attempt on the part of the author to give English readers a knowledge of what Greek tragedy was—to teach them the secret of its beauty and power. And it is not impossible that something may be thus taught. True, there is no royal road which can give us any adequate knowledge and real appreciation of ancient art; true that this process is rather beginning at the wrong end, and that instead of *Merope* teaching us what Greek tragedy is, we ought to know what Greek tragedy was to understand what *Merope* is; true that those will read it with the greatest pleasure and the highest appreciation who have got a standard with which to compare it,—gathered associations to which it can appeal,—in whose memories it stirs the half-effaced recollection of those pleasures when the intellect and imagination in their first active spring reaped the fruits of schoolboy drudgery, and first comprehended how great a thing they had gained. Yet for all this, half a loaf is better than no bread; and many men possess an instinct which enables them to gather from secondary sources alone a real insight into the subject of their inquiry; they manage to get hold of a sort of imaginative touchstone, and by means of it to pick out what is genuine, and discard what is adulterated. You can learn less perhaps of Greek literature than of any other through the medium of translations and imitations; but you had better read translations and imitations of the things themselves than be content with descriptions of them, and better read descriptions of them than know absolutely nothing of them.

Still, if Mr. Arnold's object was to extend the knowledge of Greek tragedy, and increase the English appreciation of it, he ought to have written a translation, not an imitation. He has stated his reasons for not doing so; and no doubt the latter is far pleasanter to write, and affords a better field for the powers of a poet; but, for evident reasons, it is far less valuable to others to have Mr. Arnold's idea of what a Greek play was than *Æs-*

chylus' or Sophocles' idea. If he approach the English reader any closer by an imitation than a translation, it is by being so far false to his model of a true Greek play. If, on the other hand, his object is the resurrection of the Attic drama, we don't see why the imitation should stop short of the language. If it be advisable that we should possess Greek subject-matter, expressed according to Greek ideas in Greek poetical forms, why not put it into Greek words too, and make an exact reproduction and a sealed book of it? Is ancient subject-matter, then, excluded from modern art? No; but it is one thing to attempt to reproduce ancient art, and another to use what we know of ancient life as the subject of modern art. It is difficult, indeed, most difficult, to do even this: on the one side is the danger lest by seeking for accuracy poetry become lost in antiquarianism; on the other, lest in our ignorance we content ourselves with delineating skeleton passions, and not men. Shakspeare did the most that can be done in his *Coriolanus* and *Cæsar*: he grasped ancient characters as firmly as he could; and then he delineated them, not only in English language, but in English forms of art, and through the medium of English ideas and English habits of thought. What we controvert is, the idea, openly expressed by Mr. Arnold, that there is an unworked side of English literature, in the direction of direct imitation of that of Greece.

Yet the play of *Merope* merits notice, if for no other reason, because the genius of its author stands very distinct among those of his contemporaries; and this work is an effort to exert and extend its most salutary influence. There is a pleasure in reading Matthew Arnold's poems which can be derived from few other poets of the day. He has a nice sense of the beauty of form, and to huddle together *disjecta membra* of poetry gives him no satisfaction; he knows, and in all his writings proves that he knows, that finish of execution and harmony of

proportion are essential to the completeness of a poem. And it is doubtless this conviction on his part which has made him profess himself a follower of the classical school. For take that term in its widest signification, as embracing all the modern forms of art more or less directly based on ancient models, and it is impossible to deny that it is distinguished from that which, for distinction's sake rather than from any innate propriety, has been called the romantic school,—by a more uniform regard for the proprieties of expression, the justnesses of proportion, and the polish of details. Why this should be so it is not difficult to discern. It is not, as has been sometimes supposed, and as even Mr. Arnold seems tacitly to assume, because there is something in the very spirit and nature of the more modernly evolved literature which disregards the beauty of form ; it is because it is an infinitely more difficult task to give perfect symmetry to the far more detailed and complex subject-matter of the latter. It is like the difference between drawing Retzsch's outlines and painting Titian's pictures. The modern classical school not only obtained complete models of form, but by using for the most part classical subject-matter also, it made still narrower and easier than to the ancients the conditions under which perfection—or we should rather say, correctness—of form was to be studied : for, as we have before observed, it is the mere skeleton of Greek interests and Greek ideas which can be handled by the modern artist. And this limitation reacted on the form ; for the more refined and delicate beauties of Greek art being inextricably bound up with the niceties of its subject-matter, in losing its hold of these it discarded those also, and remained meagre in substance, and hard though exact in outline.

The highest poetry, as Coleridge has said, is an *organic* growth. Its forms are the natural forms into which the vital energy shoots. This is especially true of the romantic school, in which, even in the most artificial

departments, as in the drama, the fixed rules within which the poet works are extremely broad and elastic. It is true also of the poetry of ancient Greece; and though, by reason of the religious and ceremonial origin of the drama, the conditions were more narrow and stringent, yet each great poet left his own impress on the forms as well as the subject-matter. It is not true of the modern classical school. A great scientific mind made some remarks as to the conditions and laws of the nature of the drama as it existed in his day; and these mere laws of the existing condition of an art have been made into laws of control, or rules, to guide the labours of future poets; and in later times both the rules have been narrowed and their domain has been extended. More or less modified, they became the basis of the modern classical school, and its followers have arrogated to themselves the claim of possessing a degree of art which others want. The claim, as we have said, is not entirely unfounded. They gain something; but they lose more. Given a square box, to fill it, is the French problem; given a seed, to grow it, is the English. Where the conditions are already furnished, it is easier, within the limits, to study symmetry, decorum, and appropriateness of detail. A defined path to walk in is an aid and a support to a mediocre genius; and English poetry, which suffered once from too narrow a conventionalism, is now rather in danger in an opposite direction from the disorderly venting of small and often incongruous spirits of imagination, which are not the branch and bud and flower of one single organic growth of the imagination, but mere scattered motes glittering in the sunshine. But liberty is not less great because some are too feeble to use it aright. Conventionalism of form draws with it conventionalism of phrase, and even of matter. Freedom is as noble and as essential in art as in life. In neither can we entirely dispense with laws: but the tendency of advancement is to reduce their number, and to generalise their enactments; and that moral

nature and that imagination are the highest, which have within themselves the truest instincts of harmony, and follow them with the simplest spontaneity. The evils of an imposed set of rules in art are like the evils of a paternal government: the helps of the weak are the fetters of the strong and aspiring; and we see a genius like that of Racine cramped up in unities, tied down to a monotonous verse, and compelled to sustain itself on the faded traditions of an extinct national life and a religion dead and powerless. It is the glory of the romantic, and especially perhaps of the English school of poetry,—a glory which raises it above ancient art itself, and immeasurably above its modern resuscitations and copies,—that it has dared to be free. That few have been found worthy of that freedom is true. Perhaps, on the whole, German art is more harmonious and conscientious than English; it has not had to control imaginations so warm and daring; but where the air is freest grow the stateliest trees, and a literature which can show the names of Shakspeare and of Milton, of Dryden and of Pope, of Wordsworth, of Burns, of Byron, and of Tennyson, may claim at least to have profited by the great gift of liberty. Great as is Greek art, infinite would be the loss to England if her poets should, in admiration of it, be led aside from the nobler and more difficult task of attempting to give perfection of form to the works of their native school. But this much is true, that in the study of Greek literature a poet may learn much of the beauty that lies in form; and that what our modern literature most wants is a sense of the value of completeness and finish in this respect. An English masterwork which should fully develop the lofty grace and profound beauty that consummate form is capable of bestowing, would exercise, or at least has a field for exercising, the highest influence. We do not say that Mr. Arnold should have attempted such a task. It is no derogation to his high poetical gifts to say that it is probably not within his

power; and it is certain that his tastes and predilections lead him to occupy himself with less complex and difficult subject-matter,—we say less complex and difficult, because it is undoubtedly true that, though a modern poem may be as shallow and as narrow as you please, yet one which avails itself to the full of those materials which Christianity and Western thought and civilisation have laid up, must be infinitely greater than one which is restricted to the materials at the disposal of the ancient Greeks. And moreover, Mr. Arnold's work is a service in the same direction: it exalts and exemplifies the beauty of form—indeed, is specially devoted to this object; and though that beauty be sought under conditions different from those which we now require, not easily appreciable by the mass of English readers, and which necessarily and deservedly prevent it from being popular, yet even thus it is no light gain to see it warmly and conscientiously sought after by a modern poet, and not inadequately set forth.

But while we admit that the three Greek tragedians handled their subject-matter with exquisite skill, and that they evolved from the conditions under which they worked the highest beauty of which they were capable, we by no means believe that they were ever sensible of the full capacities, and attained to the highest exercise of dramatic art, or that their plays, as *wholes*, are the highest models of form. We have neither scope nor call here to discuss the former of these assertions—few probably would dispute it; but Mr. Arnold's preface, which has drawn us into these general observations, invites some remarks on the latter.

English tragedy differs from that of Athens, not only in its forms, but in the mode in which the poet works, and in the materials he uses. The dramas of both countries have that of course in common which belongs to all tragic dramas. Both deal with the life of man; both find the centre of their imaginative life and interest in the

contemplation of those dread aspects of his mortal destiny which have actually shown themselves, which, or their like, eyes have seen and ears heard. Both set forth at once his pride and his glory, and the slipperiness of the pinnacles to which he climbs ; they contrast his energy and his vast capacity for joy and sorrow with the briefness of his day ; they represent him fruitful in resource, yet feeble to break the web of circumstance ; and in the hearts of both echoes the dim sounding of the mysterious all-surrounding sea which surges against this "bank and shoal" of time. Yet they differ to some extent in the sources which they explore and draw from, and widely in their artistic mode of presentment.

The Greek tragedy is much nearer narrative poetry than the English ; the dramatic element is less completely developed. It deals for the most part with a single incident, which it dilates upon and impresses. It is *the fact* which is of importance to the Greek tragedians,—that these things happened whereof they speak ; that the adulteress thus slew her husband returning in the splendour of his triumph ; that the son imbrued his avenging sword in the blood of the mother that bore him ; that the king, noble in nature and fixed in power, found suddenly that by strange and terrible fatality he had unwittingly, yet most horribly, defiled the sanctities of nature, and in a brief revolution of the scene, from reputation and safety and a throne, was cast down into the dust, and thrust forth murderous and incestuous, his frame yet convulsed with the agony of his discovery, his sightless eyeballs yet bleeding, to grope his way with trembling hands an exile from the land his presence desecrated. It is in these and such-like special dread events that the Greek artist mirrored or illustrated human life. He showed them on a large scale and with abundant comment ; so much so, that six or eight persons at most, besides the chorus, and one or two actions, sufficed for the exposition of the small section of event which was undertaken in a single play.

The Greek believed in an overruling Necessity, part gods, part fate, mainly unmoral, whose control men were powerless to withstand. Hence bare facts in the life of man had a significance for him they have not for us. The Englishman gives a far wider causative effect to the will and nature of each individual human being: hence he studies the life of man in the lives of men; and the naked aspects of fact, however momentous and appalling, have little interest for him unless he can connect them with the character of men. The catastrophe of an English tragedy is developed out of the characters and actions of the personages introduced, mingled, as they are mingled in life, with sudden accident. The poet has no external powers, no gods to whom he can refer as an unfailing reservoir of forces, using men as half-passive instruments. Hence there is a unity in his work, arising out of its nature, to which the Greek play can make no pretension. The only unity of action the latter claims is that of selecting a single incident which in its nature shall be sufficiently severable from the story of which it is a part to have a commencement, and a sufficient resting-place at which to stop. There is none of that final silence and rest which falls over the conclusion of an English tragedy, and leaves the spectator in sad or trembling repose.

The end of a Greek play is arbitrarily selected; the end of an English tragedy is determinately evolved; and death, which gives the completest ending, is necessary to this, while only incidental to the former. Nay, a tragic event which shall move all hearts may be represented without it, as when Orestes' cause is pleaded against the Eumenides; and in other plays, such as *The Suppliants* and *The Persians*, in which it is seen how easily the Greek drama melts into narration. But death is the unavoidable conclusion of an English tragedy; for this represents human life, as we have before said, not in isolated events, but in the whole lives and characters of single men; and without death, which rounds the course

of fate, and is the crowning incident and full completion of the dispensations of life, no man's career could be fully depicted. Without it the life would be unended, and the character uncertain. For as no man is to be esteemed happy before his death, so no man is known before his death. Hence it is that death, and death only, is the consummation of English tragedy. It comes in various shapes, and wakens various moods. Its deepening shadow perfects the sadness of the story of Desdemona; it descends like judgment, and we tremble and exult as it hangs heavy over the head of the usurping Macbeth, or menaces Richard in his dreams; or it comes like pity, longed for with tears, and gives rest to the overtaken spirit of Hamlet, or loosens the cracked heartstrings of Lear. There are no such terminations to the Greek plays. Their fragmentary character is always apparent; there is always a piece over, something undisposed of, which draws the mind beyond them into the future. Compare the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoræ* with *Hamlet*: both the latter end with death. In the first the hero comes home in his pride and his glory, and the adulteress smites him in his first hour of confidence and rest; but the scene closes with the guilty wife and her paramour exulting in their guilt. In the second the son, the god-impelled avenger, reddens his hands in the blood of his guilty mother, and when all our interest culminates on his head he vanishes. He sees the furies glare, they thicken around him with their hideous eyes, and he flies the scene in horror. Both are but parts of one story, links in the chain of dread retributions which hang over the fated house and its bloody repast of slaughtered children: in both the action is complete, and the ancient requisites satisfied; but have they in their nature the entireness of Shakspeare's play, embracing the full development of so many men's characters, drawing so many threads of action into one knot, and wrapping all in rest with the potent poison which quite o'ercrows the spirit of Hamlet? The

most curious mind cannot ask more ; no distracting glances are cast into the future ;

“Passionless calm and silence unreprieved”

fall like consolation on the heart. Completeness is a thing of degree ; but the desire for it—one of the deepest of our nature in connection with art—is in the English tragedy perhaps more fully gratified than in any other form employed by the poet. Within the boundaries of the play, the Athenian drama, however, possesses a greater and more obvious beauty of proportioned parts, more delicacy of execution as to form, finer clearer lines of grace ; and mingles in its choruses an airy calm and sweetness that must have relieved with an inexpressible sense of repose the intervening tragic action. The very inferiority of the form, as a whole, made all this more possible ; there was more room for it. A short event was displayed on a large scale. An English play, which must show lives and characters of men in a short space through the medium of action, must crowd in many actions and varied circumstances ; it must be at once terse and detailed. In the Greek, on the other hand, the matter is spread out and enlarged upon ; there is place for anticipation and comment, not only often occupying much of the speeches, but having provided for it the whole lyric element in the play, with its infinite capacities for beauty. All these things are drawn into an exquisite harmony, more easily appreciable, yet perhaps more easily attainable, and in its nature not so high as that complete fusion of all subordinate elements into the whole conception of the poet of which the English tragedy is, by its nature at least, capable.

We have said that the limitations of Mr. Arnold's genius drew him towards Greek art ; and it is so in this particular. We have given him full credit for his love of finish and proportion ; but his poems have every where shown that he is deficient in the higher power of concep-

tion, which requires unity. He balances strophe against antistrophe ; but he gives us a play with two distracting interests. He is pure in language and clear in verse ; but instead of a tragedy, he writes a melodrama with a separate tragical end to it. The story of Merope is as follows. We take it, simply for convenience, partly from each of two accounts which Mr. Arnold quotes in his preface :

“Cresphontes had not reigned long in Messenia when he was murdered together with two of his sons. And Polyphontes reigned in his stead, he too being of the family of Hercules ; and he had for his wife, against her will, Merope, the widow of the murdered king. . . .

Merope sent away and concealed her infant son. Polyphontes sought for him every where, and promised gold to whoever should slay him. He, when he grew up, laid a plan to avenge the murder of his father and brothers. In pursuance of this plan he came to King Polyphontes, and asked for the promised gold, saying he had slain the son of Cresphontes and Merope. The king ordered him to be hospitably entertained, intending to inquire further of him. He, being very tired, went to sleep ; and an old man, who was the channel through whom the mother and son used to communicate, arrives at this moment in tears, bringing word to Merope that her son had disappeared from his protector's house. Merope, believing that the sleeping stranger is the murderer of her son, comes into the guest-chamber with an axe, not knowing that he whom she would slay was her son : the old man recognised him, and withheld Merope from slaying him. After the recognition had taken place, Merope, to prepare the way for her vengeance, affected to be reconciled with Polyphontes. The king, overjoyed, celebrated a sacrifice ; his guest, pretending to strike the sacrificial victim, slew the king, and so got back his father's kingdom.”

Such is the story of Merope. Mr. Arnold does not represent her as the wife of Polyphontes ; otherwise, except perhaps to some extent in the character of the usurper, he has adhered to the tradition. We venture to say it is not well chosen for the purposes of a tragic dramatist. Its main interest—the anxiety of Merope for her son, her agony of grief for his supposed loss, and her

narrow escape of killing him, followed by the joyful recognition between them—lies wide of tragedy. We do not say there are no models for such a drama in Greek literature—the *Electra* of Sophocles is very much in point; but we say there were far higher models, such as either play of *Œdipus* or the *Antigone*, and that there is an essential difference between melodrama and tragedy, and that the latter is of a nobler class in art. In saying this, we use 'melodramatic' for want of a better word, and as superior at least to 'tragi-comic' to express, not the exaggerated display of terrors, but the characteristic of plays, in which terror is relieved and supplanted by joy; and we use 'tragedy' not in the general sense in which it is applied to the whole serious drama of the Greeks, but in the narrower and more determinate sense in which it is used in romantic literature. Escape has no place in true tragedy. The existence of it entirely changes the whole attitude of the mind. If it be said that until the *dénouement* comes, the attitude of the mind is the same in the melodrama, we say that it is not tragedy to the end, and that consummation is of the essence of tragedy; moreover, that even this temporary feeling can only be excited on a first reading or representation; and that a drama is not like a rocket to be expended in the first using, but must be little worthy the name unless it affords matter that will more or less repay a close familiarity and repeated perusal. Practically, it is not one in ten thousand who comes to a play or novel ignorant of whether it ends, as we say, well or ill. The details of a surprise may be concealed, and give pleasure; but rarely indeed can a work of art depend for its interest on a concealment of the direction of its conclusion; and where it does so, it is no very worthy source of interest. We may assume, then, that in the melodrama the reader or spectator knows the safety that is in store; and this affects all his feelings. His heart leans upon the future: he sympathises, indeed, with present sorrows; but he is sus-

tained by the knowledge that they are not to be lasting. Within the narrow limits of a play there is a sort of distraction between the emotion in the scene and the superior knowledge and different resources the spectator possesses within his own mind. It prevents *entireness* of sympathy. There is less simplicity, less reality, than in tragedy; and this is perhaps one of the main grounds of the superiority of the latter. Both are legitimate expressions of art, but tragedy the higher. Perhaps the reverse is the case in the novel. The passions are not moved in the same way. The interests are not so simple, exclusive, and swiftly accumulated. They are spread out and varied; the tragic element is intermittent, relieved, and softened, and a thousand minor sources of occupation to the mind and feelings are woven in with it. Tragedy rises like a cloud that spreads quickly over the heavens, and goes down with storm and night into the sea: a prose fiction dawns, and shines, and sets like a whole day of mingled weather, whether it be April, or August, or December. In the minuter detail and greater length of the novel, we require the repose we derive from our confidence in a happy termination. We cannot bear to be harrowed through three volumes, and find no relief at the end of them. The universal feeling is undoubtedly true. A novel that ends well is as much more perfect a work of prose fiction than one which ends tragically, as a tragic play is superior to a melodramatic one.

Merope, then, is not a subject that affords scope for the highest kind of dramatic art. Our interest in her story is one not tragical in its nature, but of *transient* grief and terror. Moreover, it ceases when, long before the conclusion of the play, the mother clasps her uninjured and recognised child in her arms. Henceforth for them the tale is told, and the play played out. All the passion and life of the poem are here concentrated: the author has carefully and skilfully used all the materials of the play to develop this crisis with simplicity and

dramatic effect, and has employed the utmost vigour and pathos of which he is master to heighten the effect and to stir the emotions. We can give no extract which will do fuller justice to the genius that shines in the play than a part of this scene:

*“ Merope. From the altar, the unaveng’d tomb,
Fetch me the sacrifice-axe!—*

*[The CHORUS goes towards the tomb of CRESPHONTES,
and their leader brings back the axe.*

O Husband, O cloth’d
With the grave’s everlasting,
All-covering darkness! O King,
Well mourn’d, but ill-aveng’d!
Approv’st thou thy wife now?—
The axe!—who brings it?

The Chorus. ’Tis here!

But thy gesture, thy look,
Appals me, shakes me with awe.

Merope. Thrust back now the bolt of that door!

The Chorus. Alas! alas!—

Behold the fastenings withdrawn
Of the guest-chamber door!—

Ah! I beseech thee—with tears—

Merope. Throw the door open!

The Chorus.

’Tis done! . . .

*[The door of the house is thrown open: the interior
of the guest-chamber is discovered, with ÆPYTUS
asleep on a couch.*

*Merope. He sleeps—sleeps calm. O ye all-seeing Gods!
Thus peacefully do ye let sinners sleep,
While troubled innocents toss and lie awake?
What sweeter sleep than this could I desire
For thee, my child, if thou wert yet alive?
How often have I dream’d of thee like this,
With thy soil’d hunting-coat, and sandals torn,
Asleep in the Arcadian glens at noon,
Thy head droop’d softly, and the golden curls
Clustering o’er thy white forehead, like a girl’s;
The short proud lip showing thy race, thy cheeks
Brown’d with thine open-air, free, hunter’s life.
Ah me! . . .
And where dost thou sleep now, my innocent boy?—
In some dark fir-tree’s shadow, amid rocks*

Untrodden, on Cyllene's desolate side ;
 Where travellers never pass, where only come
 Wild beasts, and vultures sailing overhead.
 There, there thou liest now, my hapless child !
 Stretch'd among briers and stones, the slow, black gore
 Oozing through thy soak'd hunting-shirt, with limbs
 Yet stark from the death-struggle, tight-clench'd hands,
 And eyeballs staring for revenge in vain.

Ah, miserable! . . .

And thou, thou fair-skin'd Serpent ! thou art laid
 In a rich chamber, on a happy bed,
 In a king's house, thy victim's heritage ;
 And drink'st untroubled slumber, to sleep off
 The toils of thy foul service, till thou wake
 Refresh'd, and claim thy master's thanks and gold.
 Wake up in hell from thine unhallow'd sleep,
 Thou smiling Fiend, and claim thy guerdon there!
 Wake amid gloom, and howling, and the noise
 Of sinners pinion'd on the torturing wheel,
 And the stanch Furies' never-silent scourge,
 And bid the chief tormentors there provide
 For a grand culprit shortly coming down.
 Go thou the first, and usher in thy lord !
 A more just stroke than that thou gav'st my son,
 Take—

[*MEROPE advances towards the sleeping ÆPYTUS,
 with the axe uplifted. At the same moment ARCAS
 returns.*

Arcas (to the Chorus). Not with him to council did the
 King
 Carry his messenger, but left him here.

[*Sees MEROPE and ÆPYTUS.*

O Gods ! . . .

Merope. Foolish old man, thou spoil'st my blow !

Arcas. What do I see ?

Merope. A murderer at death's door.

Therefore no words !

Arcas. A murderer? . . .

Merope. And a captive

To the dear next-of-kin of him he murder'd.

Stand, and let vengeance pass !

Arcas. Hold, O Queen, hold !

Thou know'st not whom thou strik'st. . . .

Merope. I know his crime.

Arcas. Unhappy one ! thou strik'st—

Merope. A most just blow.
Arcas. No, by the Gods, thou slay'st—
Merope. Stand off!
Arcas. Thy son!
Merope. Ah! . . .

[*She lets the axe drop, and falls insensible.*"]

The remainder of the play rests solely on the fate of Polyphontes. We have in this a true tragic element; and Mr. Arnold does all in his power to raise it up and make it replace the other interest which is exhausted. But the attempt is fruitless; not only so,—it ought not to have been made. It does not do to have two strings to a tragedy; you may have subordinate interests, but not double, still less shifting ones. You may write a tragedy of *Polyphontes*, or a melodrama of *Merope*, but not both in the same play. As it is, Polyphontes is neither strictly subordinated nor made the main interest. The *Electra* is better in this respect. After the recognition between the brother and sister, what remains, though essential, is cut short; Clytemnestra and Ægisthus are hurried briefly and swiftly to their doom, and Ægisthus never even appears on the stage until the last scene. In Mr. Arnold's play, where the natural strength of the interest is with Merope, he does all in his power to raise up a subsidiary one in Polyphontes, which he holds as a reserve when the former one flags. He binds the king up in the moral interest of the play; and he endeavours to give him such a character as shall occupy our attention, and attract our sympathies to his fate. The disquisitional parts of the play are skilfully managed, and give place for some thought and for stately and eloquent phrase and polished verse. When we say that the poetry here has something in it of coldness and the clear-cut edges, and, to us, almost bald sententiousness of his Greek models, Mr. Arnold will feel flattered, and his readers will feel disheartened. The main moral is simple and Greek enough,—that blood demands expiatory blood;

connected with which is another somewhat deeper and less Greek, viz. that no man can be so sure of himself and his motives as to be justified in making himself arbitrary judge of another, and in shedding blood and assuming power himself for the supposed welfare of others. We presume, at least, that this idea is to be conveyed, though it is rendered somewhat perplexed by the obscurity—we may say, the studied obscurity—which is cast over the character and actions of Polyphontes. His character, Mr. Arnold tells us, is not fixed by the tradition; and he feels free to deal with it as he judges best. “A finer tragic feeling, it seems to me,” he says, “is produced, if Polyphontes is represented as not wholly black and inexcusable, than if he is represented as a mere monster of cruelty and hypocrisy. Aristotle’s profound remark is well known,—that the tragic personage whose ruin is represented should be a personage neither eminently good, nor yet one brought to ruin by sheer iniquity; nay, that his character should incline rather to good than to bad; but that he should have some fault which impels him to his fall.”

Curiously enough, however, instead of painting Polyphontes partly good and partly bad, the poet leaves it uncertain whether he is good or is bad. He paints two characters—the one of a man of a determined spirit, and capable of generous devotion to another, whom a deep sense of patriotism and justice had compelled to rise in arms against, and sacrifice the life of, the king whom hitherto he had faithfully served; the other, of a man who rebels against and murders his king that he may usurp the throne for his own advantage. Polyphontes represents himself in the one light, Merope represents him in the other; and the reader is furnished with no clue to judge between them, or to decide whether Polyphontes speaks truly or hypocritically. This doubt and perplexity as to the real bent of his character is carried on to the very end of the play. His death does not help

to clear it, and Merope herself is unable to see her way out of the puzzle; her last words confess the enigma to be insoluble :

“What meantest thou, O Polyphontes, what
Desiredst thou, what truly spurr'd thee on?
Was policy of state, the ascendancy
Of the Heracleidan conquerors, as thou saidst,
Indeed thy lifelong passion and sole aim?
Or didst thou but, as cautious schemers use,
Cloak thine ambition with these specious words?
I know not; just, in either case, the stroke
Which laid thee low, for blood requires blood:
But yet, not knowing this, I triumph not
Over thy corpse, triumph not, neither mourn;
For I find worth in thee, and badness too.”

A mixed character no doubt is fitted to tragedy; but a dubious character is fitted to no dramatic art whatever. This is not the case of a complex character not easily decipherable, but of two simple enough sets of opposite qualities ascribed to one man; and the play must be read to appreciate how nicely the see-saw between the two is kept up, and how distracting an influence it exerts. From the preface, indeed, we may gather which way the balance was intended to incline; and we presume (though even with this assistance we walk very uncertainly) that Polyphontes is intended to be represented as a man of noble nature, whose rebellion was actuated in the main by noble motives; but in whose breast lay a vein of personal and selfish ambition half concealed, and but half concealed, from the consciousness of its owner. The fate of such a man might take a tragic interest which would deserve not to be eclipsed even by separate interests gathered round another: but if such was indeed the writer's aim, he has shot wide of his mark. The fact is, the forms of the Greek drama scarcely afford scope for the full development of such a character, which demands greater detail and variety of circumstance in its exhibition than can there be possibly afforded. Indeed, in

placing such a character on the stage at all, Mr. Arnold can scarcely be said to be true to his model. The general language which Aristotle uses of a man not wholly good or bad, but leaning one way rather than the other, is very descriptive of the amount of human character which the Greek drama required. It uses the men to bring out the story. It does not dwell upon or seek to display the self-originating springs of action. Man stands there as a more or less passive instrument, on which destiny, the gods, and circumstance play; and the character assigned him is only as it were the setting of that instrument at a certain pitch. A character like that which we have presumed the author intends for Polyphontes confuses a Greek play; it raises a crowd of moral questions and dilemmas which have no place there. Merope's simple dictum on his death,—

“just in either case the stroke
Which laid thee low, for blood requires blood,”—

does not satisfy us. We are launched on the inquiry whether the blood was rightly shed: we seek to know whether the man was true to himself,—whether his own conscience exonerated him; and these are not questions either to be asked or solved in Greek tragedy. It concerns itself full little with the motives of action. Herein Mr. Arnold has scarcely been true either to the outward destiny-controlled morality of ancient Greece, or the placid acquiescences of modern Oxford. It is not this, however, but the duality of nature we have before spoken of, which prevents our taking an interest in Polyphontes, or even grasping him at all by the imagination. We read his speeches, and admire them; but have no notion of the man, and therefore care not for his fate. When Æpytus slays him, we feel indifferent whether he had struck the steer or the king: our only impression is, that an elderly insoluble riddle is dead. We are grateful, but not moved.

These are faults, and they are such as were to be looked for from our former experience of the author's writings. We suppose the phrenologists would say he wants individuality. He does not grasp wholes, or even the larger aspects of things. It is in his details we learn how fine a poetic faculty he really possesses. His is not a creative, it is an expressive genius. Hence some of his best poems are those in which he gives a direct voice to his own feelings. He has not that tranquil and complete imagination which without effort embraces a wide field, and compels it into a small and perfect circle of creative art; and which, working outward from an inner conception, stamps the harmony of its own nature on its work. Few indeed are the poets that possess it. Matthew Arnold's is a symmetrical rather than a harmonious genius. He creates parts, and adjusts them together. He wants depth and largeness of artistic power; but he has an exquisite taste, the faculty that detects at least minor disproportions and discrepancies. He has a nice sense of fitness and proportion, and, in all that goes to furnish beauty and finish of execution, it would not be easy to rival him among living poets. His poetry wants power: this play does not move you deeply, nor leave as a whole any profound impression; but step by step it is to be read with a high degree of pleasure, and of a high kind. For the author is rich in poetic instincts, and not devoid of the true poet's insight, and his work is informed throughout with an unfailing life of imagination and fancy. Moreover, his faculties are never strained—he strikes no note above his natural compass. The whole conception of the tragedy perhaps taxes his powers fully as far as they can bear; but in the conduct of it he everywhere displays the decent composure of moderate strength, none of the spasmodic effort of weakness. He has a reticence which enables you to enjoy him with a sense that there is more power in reserve, and sometimes a glowing coal breaks out through the lambent play of

imaginative diction which generally characterises him;— and it *is* imaginative, not fanciful. Almost always he writes from the deeper hold of the imagination, not from the lighter grasp of fancy. It is fancy, perhaps, though in her very highest mood, that speaks of

“ lightning passion, that with grasp of fire
Advances to the middle of a deed
Almost before 'tis planned;”

but it is imagination that gives their beauty to so many of the choruses, and to that exquisite piece of descriptive writing detailing the supposed death of Æpytus. He has come nearer, we think, than any other candidate to giving the effect of the Greek chorus. Though his verse wants something of varied cadence and music, and the changes lie within too limited a range: and though, too, the sharp incessant *ictus* strikes with something of an artificial sound on the ear, yet he has caught something of that warbling lyric effect which is most characteristic of the ancient choruses, and makes them more like the singing of birds than any other music.

MRS. BROWNING.*

[April 1857.]

It is a rash and futile effort of criticism to limit the forms in which poetic conception is to embody itself. The criticism of artistic forms is the science of an art. It measures a world which is always growing; and its dry system is at any moment liable to be burst asunder by the vital energy of the life to which it professes to assign its appropriate framework. Its work is the same as that of the lawyer, who, having reduced a medley of judicial decisions to an *ex-post-facto* "principle," as he fondly calls it, is suddenly called on to make room in it for a new decision in the Exchequer Chamber. For the poet is greater than the critic; and when the latter says, "thus far shalt thou come, and no farther," he stands like the flattered king upon the sands, and every new wave washes the ground from under his feet. So, too, of the distinctions between prose and poetry, the discussion of which is but a branch of the same school of inquiry. It is idle to attempt to assign them beforehand their respective boundaries. To use one of Mrs. Browning's metaphors with as much boldness and as little appropriateness as she herself is apt to employ them, they

"Play at leap-frog over the god Term."

That certain rules of composition sustain themselves at all, is due to the fact, that creative genius of a high order is not impatient of forms; but rather loves, on the contrary, to have certain limits defined for it, and to be freed

* *Aurora Leigh*. By E. B. Browning. Chapman and Hall. 1857.

to some extent from "the weight of too much liberty." Shakspeare did not fret because tragedies are limited to five acts, nor Milton quarrel with the formal conditions of an epic poem.

Still, art is free ; and when it chooses to break through old conditions which have been considered essential, and assume fresh forms, the new work vindicates or condemns itself. If it recommend itself to that ultimate human judgment with which the verdict lies, it takes its place in spite of all canons to the contrary ; if not, it sinks into obscurity, or, if it lives at all, it is because some inner worth outweighs the faultiness and unfitness of the form in which it is embodied.

When, therefore, we say that Mrs. Browning has to some extent misconceived the sphere of verse in her novel of *Aurora Leigh*, and embarrassed herself with details of incident too complex for the rhythmical vehicle of expression, we make the assertion with as much modesty as a critic is capable of, and with a due consciousness that our conclusions are liable to be upset by any poet who chooses to produce a great and harmonious poem under conditions which we have pronounced to be ill adapted to his art. There is this strong fact, however, against the attempt to clothe the modern novel in verse, that verse was not the natural and spontaneous mode of expression which that kind of literature assumed. In all its stages of development, up to its present complex form, in which it fuses into a homogeneous new mould the old distinctions of epic and dramatic, it has always been in prose that its many gifted masters have found the medium for their utterance. At this day, to attempt to translate it into verse seems to us like an attempt to imitate in sculpture the Transfiguration of Raphael, or the Blind Fiddler of Wilkie. It does not follow, because verse is the highest instrument of expression, and finds a voice more ample and perfect than any other for the passion both of the imagination and the heart, that it has any

claim in itself beyond this very fact of its being such true expression, or that you gain any thing by employing it for its own sake. It seems to us a decided loss of power to attempt to give a rhythmical form to the varied narration, the detailed conversation, and the minute and full-length representations of the modern conditions of social and individual life, which have already been so ably and so fully embodied in prose forms. We should go farther than to say merely that verse wants pliancy to adapt itself to those fine ramifications of external observation to which we have become accustomed, or that the contrast is too immediate between the every-day forms of speech which we are in the habit of using, and the same reproduced with a rhythmic cadence; we urge that there are many things which, from their very nature, it is a breach of those essential harmonies to which, of all men, the poet should be most alive, to attempt to embody in the language of the imagination.

Verse has two very different uses; it may be used either as the expression of poetic thought, or as a mere external grace, to give a charm to narratives, or pieces of humour, to which it is not in any sense necessary. Parts of Pope, of Crabbe, and of Prior, afford ready illustrations of this use of it. But when we speak of poetry, we mean, in general, verse used as the embodiment of poetic conception, to which it clings as the body of a man does to his spirit. It is possible to take this sort of expression, which true poetic conception demands, and use it for subject-matter which does not in itself require it; and, instead of letting the thought kindle the imagination for its own particular occasion, to maintain an artificial heat for general purposes. This is what is done throughout a great part of Mrs. Barrett Browning's poem. A greater master teaches another lesson. When his matter descends, Shakspeare's forms descend with it; and wherever the nature of his subject-matter demands it, he intersperses prose scenes, or even prose speeches, in his

dramas ; and more remarkable than these changes are the subtle variations in the rhythm and in the warmth of the imaginative colouring, answering every where in the nicest correspondence to the level of the subject-matter. But Mrs. Browning maintains her high unstooping flight over all the varied surface of her story. She dresses her poetry as the ancient actors did their persons ; and like them, she loses in truthfulness and nicety of expression what she gains in external display ; and it repels the modern reader to find, instead of changing feature and modulated voice, the rigid tragic mask and sounding mouthpiece of the Greek theatre. This undue poetic excitement shows itself in the imaginative diction alone, and is not accompanied by any corresponding elevation in the structure of the metre, or the flow of the rhythm : in these the approach to prose is made as close as possible, bearing some such analogy to ordinary poetry as recitative does to singing ; for while the lines are rhythmical, the periods are almost all prosaic. The result we cannot help thinking a very unsatisfactory one ; and when, in this semi-verse, semi-prose, the matter of the author comes couched in the most daring and far-fetched metaphor, it makes the reading inconceivably difficult and wearisome. Where the matter is such as to be in keeping with this high poetic utterance, as in the last pages of the book, there is enough to kindle the answering fire in the reader's brain ; and the bold and passionate snatchings of the imagination at depths of meaning which no other language but its own can compel to the surface, are intuitively followed and comprehended. It is otherwise when ordinary conversation, discussion, narrative, reasoning, or self-communing, are expressed in the poetic forms which poetic matter alone justifies ; clothed upon with purple diction, and made to glitter with blazing jewelry of metaphor ; distracting the reader from the matter before him, annoying him with their inappropriateness, and often puzzling him to seize their

meaning. Take as an instance this description of the paper and printing of Wolff's *Homer*:

"The kissing Judas, Wolff, shall go instead,
Who builds us such a royal book as this
To honour a chief-poet, folio-built,
And writes above, 'The house of Nobody :'
Who floats in cream, as rich as any sucked
From Juno's breasts, the broad Homeric lines,
And, while with their spondaic prodigious mouths,
They lap the lucent margins as babe-gods,
Proclaims them bastards. Wolff's an atheist."

Or read the following description of a lady tearing a letter; of the extravagance of which the author herself seems to be sensible, and which she half apologises for, and half justifies. But though a letter might possibly be torn under circumstances of weight and passion to justify such a simile, yet we cannot think that the destruction of an instrument of gift, even before the eyes of giver and lover, can warrant it:

"As I spoke, I tore
The paper up and down, and down and up
And crosswise, till it fluttered from my hands,
As forest-leaves, stripped suddenly and rapt
By a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again,
Drop slow, and strew the melancholy ground
Before the amazed hills . . . why, so, indeed,
I'm writing like a poet, somewhat large
In the type of the image,—and exaggerate
A small thing with a great thing, topping it!—
But then I'm thinking how his eyes looked . . . his,
With what despondent and surprised reproach!"

This want of accordance between the matter and the manner is not a superficial defect, it is connected with the fundamental characteristics of Mrs. Browning's genius; rather, we ought to say, with a fundamental deficiency which leaves its trace on all her works, and limits powers which would otherwise lift her into the very highest ranks of the poetical hierarchy. But she is a poet cleft in half; she wants one whole side of the facul-

ties of the artist ; and though the other side be great beyond the ordinary proportions of our modern poets, the loss is one which necessarily affects the whole frame, can only be partially compensated by other excellencies, and can never be replaced.

The greatest poets have been those whose spirits are set in such fine harmony with the world of things outside themselves, that you can scarcely say whether they breathe their own music, or it is breathed out of them by the influences which surround them. Wordsworth, indeed, is more of a conscious interpreter ; but Shakspeare seems like some mighty organ, from which the passions, and the affections, and the characters of men, draw each its own tones ; and Homer is the name not of a man but of a poem. These things are not really so. The poet does indeed create ; but he creates from so complete a sympathy, that he is lost in his work, and it is as if the children of his imagination were the immediate offspring of Nature herself. Such poets receive openly what they give, and give openly back what they have received. They are like the flowing rivers, which gather their waters from every source that earth affords ; into which every scattered spring and land-draining brook empties its waters ; which increase by the quick rains of heaven, the fleeting snow, and the gray dew from the grasses on their banks ; which tinge their currents with a trace of every soil through which they pass ; and as they flow on render, out of the abundance of that they have received, beauty and fertility and joy. Others there are, like springs of clear water, which bubble up into some great reservoir ; but are fed from secret and subterranean sources, whose strength and freshness seem to be in themselves, and by whose innate virtue man and beast are revived and strengthened. All poets partake more or less of the characteristics of each class ; but perhaps no great poet has ever belonged so exclusively to the latter as Mrs. Browning. It is from the strength of her own soul, the

resources of her own intellect, and the riches of her own heart, that she writes. She gives no voice to the world around her. It is herself she is pressed to utter. And this is not only the unconscious, but the direct and conscious aim of her striving. She even tells us it is so :

“ With stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night,
With dream and thought and feeling interwound,
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height,
Which step out grandly to the infinite,
From the dark edges of the sensual ground !
This song of soul I struggle to outbear,
Through portals of the sense sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air.”

She is never the passive subject of that sort of inspiration by which some men almost unconsciously render back the impressions of things around them ; what comes from her is part of her. It is the song of her own soul she “ struggles to outbear,” and she grasps the outer world to make it yield her a language. Not till a thing has become transmuted into the substance of her own mind does she feel the impulse to speak it ; and then only she turns to external things, and her imagination ranges out through the circle of the universe to find some full and adequate voice for it. Shakspeare used himself to express other men. Mrs. Browning uses all things to express herself. The whole machinery of *Aurora Leigh*,—poetic conception, dramatic personages, varied incident,—are not shown for themselves, but to expound and elucidate one main, and various subordinate, ideas of the author. She holds that the poet must have lived his poetry before he writes it, and speaks passionately of the suffering and the effort that his career demands :

“ Art
Sets action on the top of suffering :
The artist’s part is both to be and do,

Transfixing with a special, central power
 The flat experience of the common man,
 And turning outward, with a sudden wrench,
 Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing
 He feels the inmost: never felt the less
 Because he sings it. Does a torch less burn
 For burning next reflectors of blue steel,
 That *he* should be the colder for his place
 'Twixt two incessant fires,—his personal life's,
 And that intense refraction which burns back
 Perpetually against him from the round
 Of crystal conscience he was born into
 If artist-born? O sorrowful great gift
 Conferred on poets, of a twofold life,
 When one life has been found enough for pain!"

This is, we have little doubt, a very truthful, as well as very forcible, description of her own experience as a poet; but it is far from being a true description of all poets, or at least of the whole function of any complete poet. No man, from the riches of his own life and actually experienced feelings, could have written *Lear* and *Hamlet*. Even in lyrical poetry, greater poems have been written from feelings assumed by the imagination than from real ones. Burns, more than most poets, found the sources of his poetry within his own heart; yet "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled" is greater than even "Thou lingering star with lessening ray." But Mrs. Browning has little, if any, of this power of assuming a temporary sympathy by virtue of the imagination alone; and she is still more destitute of another, closely allied to it,—the capacity of speaking from a point of view not one's own. This capacity is the basis of dramatic power; and therefore of dramatic power Mrs. Browning has not even the rudiments. Much pure gold issues from her treasury; but she coins it all, and stamps it with her own image. Her poetry is isolated and sedentary; not isolated in its sympathies, which are as warm and broad and tender as poet's need to be; but her voice comes as the voice of one who has always dwelt apart, and felt for men and admired Nature at a distance,

rather than walked familiarly in the common pathways. Hence, as she does not go down among that mass of men who read her, they must come up to her to understand. Proportioned to the absence of mobile capacity in herself is the demand she makes on that of her readers. They must assume her standing-place, and look on her work from her own point of view, if they would comprehend her meanings. Her very greatness makes this difficult; it is not all minds which can adapt themselves to her intellectual focus. Moreover, partly a want of experience, which shows in her writings, partly her own constitution, throw her back a good deal on the facts of her own inner life; and thus there is often a difficult subject-matter as well as a difficult treatment.

This want of intimacy, if we may so call it, with the outward world, is probably at the bottom of a peculiar defectiveness in the expressional matter of Mrs. Browning's poetry. We have before spoken of a discordance between the whole imaginative temper and the matter; but besides this, there is often an utter want of harmony between the matter in hand and the simile under which it is represented to us: the likeness may be true enough, forcible, and cogent; but it carries with it a distracting set of associations, and makes a sudden discord, to which Mrs. Browning seems to be insensible. Our meaning will be made clear, and our criticism best justified, by quoting some of the most marked instances of this defect. In her last poem she has the following passage to express and illustrate a poet's rendering of his age:

"Never flinch,
But still, unscrupulously epic, catch
Upon the burning lava of a song,
The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age:
That, when the next shall come, the men of that
May touch the impress with reverent hand, and say,
'Behold,—behold the paps we all have sucked!'"

The contrast is almost savage. Burning lava and a

woman's breast! and concentrated in the latter the fullest ideas of life. It is absolute pain to read it. No man could have written it; for, independently of its cruelty, there is a tinge in it of a sort of forward familiarity, with which Mrs. Browning sometimes, and never without uneasiness to her readers, touches upon things which the instinct of the other sex prevents them, when undebased, from approaching without reverence and tenderness.

A little further on we have some lines on which commentary is hopeless; we only ask for their perusal, and for a deliberate consideration of the varied metaphors:

"'Tis true the stage requires obsequiousness]
To this or that convention; 'exit' here
And 'enter' there; the points for clapping, fixed,
Like Jacob's white-peeled rods before the rams;
And all the close-curved imagery clipped
In manner of their fleece at shearing-time.
Forget to prick the galleries to the heart
Precisely at the fourth act,—culminate
Our five pyramidal acts with one act more,—
We're lost so!"

When you are describing the shifty life of a degraded drunken vagrant, is it fitting to embody in this exquisite language his occasional help in driving Welsh ponies?

"Her father earned his life by random jobs
Despised by steadier workmen—keeping swine
On commons, picking hops, or hurrying on
The harvest at wet seasons,—or, at need,
Assisting the Welsh drovers, when a drove
Of startled horses plunged into the mist
Below the mountain-road, and sowed the wind
With wandering neighings. In between the gaps
Of such irregular work, he drank and slept,
And cursed his wife because, the pence being out,
She could not buy more drink."

Sometimes the indiscriminating lavishness with which the imagery is poured forth results in the direst confusion; as in the following lines, where we are represented

as shut up with wild-beasts inside a key (for it is the natural world we are shut up in), whose wards, moreover, we have filled with clay :

“ ‘ Thus it is,’

I sighed. And he resumed with mournful face.
 ‘ Beginning so, and filling up with clay
 The wards of this great key, the natural world,
 And fumbling vainly therefore at the lock
 Of the spiritual,—we feel ourselves shut in
 With all the wild-beast roar of struggling life,
 The terrors and compunctions of our souls,
 As saints with lions,—we who are not saints,
 And have no heavenly lordship in our stare
 To awe them backward!’ ”

It is a common error of Mrs. Browning's to carry her image just one step too far, and thus to raise it out of its proper subordination, and give it an undue importance; so that, instead of being subdued and moulded to the tone of the matter, it lifts its strong and rugged head, and insists on an independent recognition. For instance, when she speaks of her father's Elzevirs, written over with his faded notes :

“ — *conferenda hæc cum his*—
Corruptè citat—lege potiùs,
 And so on, in the scholar's regal way
 Of giving judgment on the parts of speech,
 As if he sate on all twelve thrones up-piled,
 Arraigning Israel.”

Here the single word “regal” conveys all that is wanted with abundantly ample force and distinctness; and the two last lines serve only to distract us, by introducing a misplaced definiteness and a set of ideas on a new scale too large for the thought.

It would be absurd, of course, to say that Mrs. Browning is destitute of an insight into or a sense of the true harmonious relations of things, for without this she could not be a poet; and few poets surpass her in that felicitous command over the hidden and mysterious powers of words

and their associations, which is of the very essence of the poet's art; but she wants the negative sense which shrinks from a discord. Probably an intense intellectual activity has something to do with this: her mind moves in starts; one idea occupies her for a moment; she holds it up in the vivid light of her imagination, throws it down, and seizes another. Her intellect is too fertile in proportion to her artistic instincts; and her thoughts and fancies bristle up over her work "like quills upon the fretful porcupine." It is a great fault in her poetry, that it wants the fine connecting links by which parts are smoothed into a whole. Rapid and sudden transitions may, of course, often be effective and desirable; but Mrs. Browning's poetry is apt to be broken up by a constant series of small disconnections; her carriage has no springs; and though the main course of the poem and the thought is consecutive, the reader is sadly jolted by the way.

Sometimes Mrs. Browning's high-wrought metaphors give the impression of a vice which she is bound by all the indisputable greatness of her gifts not to fall into,—that of straining for effect from mere startling force of diction, instead of seeking in simplicity the truest expression,—that meretricious display of matterless large-mouthedness, for which much modern poetry is commended. Of a conscious acquiescence in this sort of untruthfulness,—for it is of the nature of untruthfulness,—no one who has read and knows the poetry of Mrs. Browning will for a moment accuse her; but she may be fairly charged with having rather spurred on, when she should have curbed, her naturally daring and vehement imagination. And she loses by it; for just as a mounted horse can always overtake an unmounted one, so power is greater and more effective when under the control of a higher power. It leads her astray too sometimes. Real life is higher and more responsible than any art, and no gain of force in imagery can justify the least failing in religious reverence. But Mrs. Browning has accustomed

herself to so stimulating a diet, that when she has exhausted all earthly elements of intensity, she is fain to resort to divine ones, and the most sacred ideas and associations are used as mere material for poetry with a boldness which shocks and startles; and though we are far from saying that she writes with conscious irreverence, it is certain that she has passages which cannot be read without a shrinking sense of undue familiarity with the most awful objects to which our thoughts can aspire. It is as if she did not scruple to light her torch at that burning bush before which Moses bowed with unsandalled feet. And she not only uses things too high to give forcible embodiment to her thoughts; she pulls down the highest things, and thrusts them into her sharply-bounded decisive similes, with a freedom which we cannot designate as less than repulsive. She compares the Lord Christ, assuming our flesh, to

“Some wise hunter creeping on his knees,
With a torch, into the blackness of some cave,
To face and quell the beast there.”

She tells us of the creation of man,

“Within whose fluttering nostrils then at last,
Consummating Himself, the Maker sighed,
As some strong winner at the footrace sighs
Touching the goal.”

This sort of audacity, and all Mrs. Browning's excess of high-sounding phrase and elaborate and startling metaphor, are signs of some deficiency in real strength; just as a feeble man must use a more violent effort than a strong one to attain to the same end, and as he who is timid and self-distrustful makes the greatest show of his weapons. It needs, indeed, a high class of power to wield the glittering instruments Mrs. Browning grasps with the grace and ease which she displays; but there is a higher class of power, whose might is in the simplicity of its own strength; which dares go unarmed, and un-

sheathes its sword only when the occasion is absolute; and whose single home-stroke is more fatal than a thousand of these intricate flourishings. "The Cry of the Children" is a poem of infinite pathos and passionate appeal; but Mrs. Browning has written as a motto to it a short direct unadorned line, whose vivid flash pales even the fine splendours of the poem which succeeds:

φεῦ, φεῦ, τί προσδέσκεσθε μ' ὄμμασιν τέκνα;

We have criticised in a strict and uncompromising spirit the defects of Mrs. Browning's workmanship and the limitations of her genius. We have no compunction in doing so; for the least she merits is, to be tried by no debased standard. Her faults and defects are important, by reason of the value of the work from whose perfectness they detract. On the other hand, her gifts are great; so great, that England will never cease to number her among the first ranks of its poets. In abundance of ideas, in a certain fineness, vigour, and fire of intellect, she surpasses all her contemporaries. Her mind has a peculiar clearness and brilliancy, and shows the signs of much direct culture. The isolation and immobility we have indicated narrow indeed her resources, but they shut out too all profane intrusion into the pure and lofty sphere of her own meditations. All her poetry introduces us but to one mind and one nature; but it must be a rich and spacious one which from its own treasury can bring forth matter "new and strange," profound and true, in so great a profusion. A lofty spirit shines through all her lines. Her muse has a sort of proud virgin carriage. No eyes dare gaze on her disrespectfully. Clear air hangs about her. She writes as from the unsullied ideal of a girl of fifteen, and with the same sort of freshness and intellectual eagerness. She puts aside the shortcomings of the world, half in ignorance,

half in disdain ; its basenesses and pettinesses lie under her unconscious feet, and her clear eyes, fixed on the morning, have no wandering glances for the lower shadows. The vice and wickedness of the world she sees ; but scans it from afar, as one standing on the mountains ; and the sin which comes to her with the force of reality is not that which consists in grovelling in the fens below, but in false steps and shortcomings in climbing the heights. As you read, you see (though this applies more to her early poems) that her mind has been nurtured on books rather than on things ; and what she gives us of living and fresh is from the life and freshness of her own nature. Direct and brief expressions of personal feeling or conviction are best adapted to her genius. Perhaps she has written finer things than her sonnets ; yet most of her readers turn oftenest to these ; and they have now and then a perfect grace and harmony, unspoiled by those small jars which too often grate upon us in reading her longer poems. We will instance one which, of all, is perhaps the best known, and therefore the best for our purpose. Custom cannot stale the infinite variety of good poetry :

“ When some beloved voice that was to you
 Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
 And silence, against which you dare not cry,
 Aches round you like a strong disease and new,
 What hope ? what help ? what music will undo
 That silence to your sense ? Not friendship’s sigh,
 Not reason’s subtle count. Not melody
 Of viols, nor of pipes that Faunus blew ;
 Not songs of poets, nor of nightingales,
 Whose hearts leap upward through the cypress-trees
 To the clear moon ! nor yet the spheric laws
 Self-chanted,—nor the angels’ sweet all-hails,
 Met in the smile of God. Nay, none of these.
 Speak THOU, availing Christ !—and fill this pause.”

A passionate tenderness finds a voice in the Portuguese sonnets. Nay, so passionate and so tender are

they, that one half shrinks from the perusal of them, and reads with some such feelings as one opens the love-letters of those long dead, and can scarcely reconcile oneself to an intrusion into the innermost secrets of another heart.

Her earlier great poems are celestial dramas. In some respects she has not improved on them. The *Drama of Exile*, looked at simply for the diction, is a far more finished poem than *Aurora Leigh*. It is briefer, simpler, completer. In its matter it is far inferior; but a fervid imagination, without the experience which furnishes it with materials out of actual life, is very apt to seize on this sort of subject. There is a tempting boundlessness of field; nothing cramps the play of the fancy. And Mrs. Browning's mind, especially in its younger and less experienced time, was exactly calculated to find fascination in a subject like that of "The Seraphim." It is a stimulating mental exercise to endeavour to understand how Angels look upon the universe, and feel and express themselves with reference to the mysteries of man's creation and destiny. But there must necessarily be so much of mere hypothesis and unbased fancy in these speculations; they touch so remotely the living interests of men; the ideas and affections they deal with are so floating and unattached,—that they can never form the subject-matter of great and permanent works of art. It is useless to attempt to conceal from ourselves that we know nothing whatever of Gabriel, Michael, or Lucifer; and it is only by re-creating for ourselves certain more or less disproportioned human figures to which we give these names, that it is possible to take any interest in them. It is the anthropomorphism and overwhelming human element in Milton's *Paradise Lost* from which it derives its power over us. Nevertheless there is a sort of poetic rejoicing in soaring in such wide and untried regions; and Mrs. Browning's ardent, strong-winged, contemplative imagination was just the one to try its earlier flights in these

bright but distant fields of air. Still with her, as with all others, it is when she touches closest on human sympathies that we lend our readiest ear, and are willing, not unwisely, to think her poetry at its best. Eminently beautiful, though not without a certain vagueness in the idea, is that chorus of Eden spirits, whose sounds pursue Adam and Eve as they fly from Paradise :

“Hearken, O hearken ! let your souls behind you

Turn, gently moved !

Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,

O lost, beloved !

Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled angels,

They press and pierce :

Our requiems follow fast on our evangels,—

Voice throbs in verse !

We are but orphan spirits left in Eden

A time ago.

God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden

To feed you so.

But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,

No work to do,

The mystic hydromel is spilt and staining

The whole earth through.

Most ineradicable stains for showing

(Not interfused !)

That brighter colours were the world's foregoing,

Than shall be used.

Hearken, O hearken ! ye shall hearken surely,

For years and years,

The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,

Of spirits' tears !

The yearning to a beautiful denied you,

Shall strain your powers ;

Ideal sweetnesses shall over-glide you,

Resumed from ours !

In all your music, our pathetic minor

Your ears shall cross ;

And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,

With sense of loss.

We shall be near you in your poet-languors

And wild extremes,

What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,

Or mock with dreams.

And when upon you, weary after roaming,
 Death's seal is put,
 By the foregone ye shall discern the coming
 Through eyelids shut."

More human and more lovely in their deep yet restrained pathos are the concluding lines of the "Song of the Morning Star to Lucifer;" words that are like the verbal reflection of the pale shining of the planet in heaven, and afford as complete an instance as one could desire of that sort of harmony between the thing and the expression, against the frequent breach of which in *Aurora Leigh* we have protested:

"Thine angel glory sinks
 Down from me, down from me,—
 My beauty falls, methinks,
 Down from thee, down from thee!

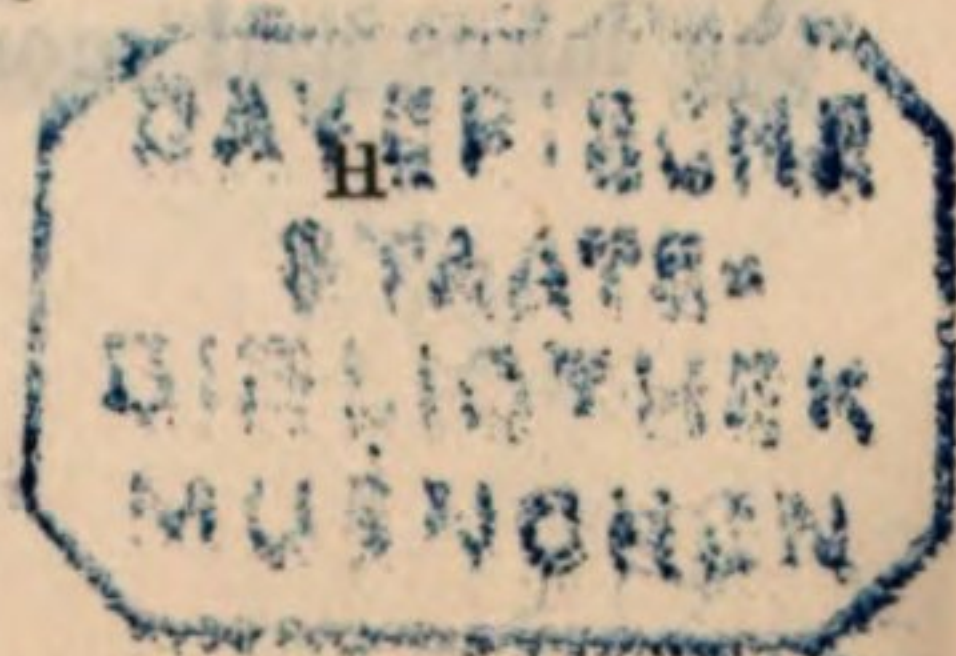
O my light-bearer,
 O my path-preparer,
 Gone from me, gone from me!
 Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

I cannot kindle underneath the brow
 Of this new angel here, who is not Thou:
 All things are altered, since that time ago,—
 And if I shine at eve, I shall not know!
 I am strange—I am slow.
 Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

Henceforward, human eyes of lovers be
 The only sweetest sight that I shall see,
 With tears between the looks raised up to me.
 Ah, ah!

When, having wept all night, at break of day,
 Above the folded hills they shall survey
 My light, a little trembling, in the gray.
 Ah, ah!

And gazing on me, such shall comprehend,
 Through all my piteous pomp at morn or even,
 And melancholy leaning out of heaven,
 That love, their own divine, may change or end,
 That love may close in loss!
 Ah, ah, Heosphoros!"



It was natural that Mrs. Browning, as her powers developed themselves, and her experiences widened, should leave this school of poetry behind her. It was natural, too, that she should desire to go beyond the more detached and simpler subject-matters of her shorter poems, and attempt the higher task of giving a shape of verse to the more complex phenomena of life and society. Her present flight is an ambitious one. If we rightly understand her, she tells us that *Aurora Leigh* is her attempt in a poem "unscrupulously epic" to "represent the age" in which she lives. She admits that to most men their own age, being too close, is as ill-discerned, as would be the lineaments of that colossal statue into which Xerxes proposed to carve Mount Athos to the peasants "gathering brushwood in his ear." But, she says,

" Poets should
Exert a double vision ; should have eyes
To see near things as comprehensively
As if afar they took their point of sight,
And distant things as intimately deep
As if they touched them."

She tells us, that if there is any room for poets in the world, their sole work is to represent their own times. And she seems to think that in a single poem a poet can condense a sort of distillation of his age ; and this she has attempted in *Aurora Leigh*. Such, at least, is what we gather from the poem itself.

Now there is no doubt that every great poet must more or less give expression to the times in which he lives. No man can be a great poet whose power and knowledge are not derived from an insight into the actual life which surrounds him ; and it is impossible that the conditions under which he has lived, and the things which he has most familiarly known, should not leave their impress upon him, and through him upon his work. As Wordsworth's poetry is haunted by the influences of the lakes and mountains ; as the nature of the Scottish

peasant underlies the genius of Burns; as a self-willed worldly spirit clings to the highest flights of Byron; as Milton cannot shake off the Puritan, and even Shakspeare has some flavour of the courtier,—so it is idle to suppose every poet and every man does not carry the impress of the less close but more universal influences of the social conditions which surround him. It does not follow, however, that he is the greatest poet who most fully and most immediately reproduces these influences in the gross; still less that it is the highest effort of the poet consciously to devote himself to this task. Man is greater and more interesting than the life he lives, and it is greater to paint him simply under the conditions of his own nature, than under any restricted conditions of circumstance; it is profounder and more lasting to use the special surroundings in which men exist (and without using which they cannot be painted at all) to body forth the men themselves, than to attempt to reproduce an abstract whole of men and their lives as they live at a given time,—a higher task to use the age to show a man than to use men to show an age. When it was said of the greatest poet that he was of no age, it was no idle compliment; it was not meant that he wrote of things abstract and disconnected from the realities of every age; but that he pierced to those deeper realities which underlie all the ages of men, which are what the root and springing sap of the tree are to the fleeting generations of its leaves. He used the special as a body for the universal. It is true a poet may legitimately take a lower flight than this; he may choose to embody the leading ideas and characteristics of the period of time in which he lives; and this, no doubt, is a higher artistic effort than to attempt to embody those of any other particular age,—if for no other reason, because he is dealing with things more real, more familiar, and in all probability of a deeper interest. It does not follow, however, even if this be his direct object, that his events and his

characters must be chosen from those which immediately surround him. He may select in the past, or invent for himself, the framework of his poem of modern ideas; or he may deal with the ideas of the past for the sake of some bearing they have, either by contrast or analogy, on the ideas of the present. Kingsley's *Saint's Tragedy*, and Tennyson's *Princess*, are cases in point. Mrs. Browning, however, holds,—and the idea is a common one at the present day,—that it is a higher effort to represent modern ideas in their actual modern dress. Perhaps it is. Certainly it is a much more difficult one. Perhaps the poet ought to be able to see his own times at the same moment with the eyes of one removed from them and one near to them; but we know no poet who has ever done so. It is obvious enough to cite Homer; but even granting that “Wolff's an atheist,” it is not easy to believe that “the tale of Troy divine” was written in the actual times it deals with. The Homeric poems give us our knowledge of the Homeric age; but whether they are a true description of the times of Achilles, or a story cast in those times, and an incidentally true delineation of the manners and thoughts of a later time in which they were written, is, to say the least of it, an open question. Even the satirist paints his times, not as they are, but in their relation to a special preconceived idea of his own. No doubt it is easy to clothe some of the simpler elements of the present life in the dress of the time; but the deeper and more searching the knowledge of a poet of the great and fundamental characteristics of the life which surrounds him, the more difficult and intricate a task does it become to reproduce these things in their actual context with the thousand crossing and entangled details through which he has pierced to and gathered up their real significance. His instinct,—and we think it is a true one,—is, to take what he has gained quite away from these complications, and crystallise it in some new form, in which it may shine in fuller clearness and simplicity.

However this may be, Mrs. Browning has undertaken to build a poem purely from modern materials. She has produced a work which, in completeness of form and artistic execution, falls far short of many of her previous efforts; but which in matter far surpasses the best of them. A wider experience, a profounder philosophy, a more real and human knowledge, attempt to find a voice in language more removed than that of any of her other poems from the adequacy of genuine simplicity, and are couched in a semi-dramatic form, a form with which the author's genius least qualifies her to deal successfully. As is natural, nay inevitable, from the conformation of Mrs. Browning's mind, her poem deals primarily with ideas of her own; and all the narrative and dramatic elements in the book are but the constituent materials in the erection of an edifice of thought. We cannot help thinking, that where this is the case, care should be taken that these elements should preserve the same secondary place in the poem that they do in the matter. Mrs. Browning has unfortunately given a most undue prominence to the least valuable and most defective part of her work. Unpossessed, as we have before said, of that pliancy and mobility of mind which qualifies a poet to deal with details of external life, she selects a poem to which such details are indispensable, and even then overlays her matter with a mass of them totally unnecessary. Minuteness of incident receives the utmost redundancy of expression; and the real thread of her meaning runs through the whole like a golden wire strung thick with beads, and obscured from all but special research. Perhaps one reader in a thousand can master Mrs. Browning's poem at a single reading; though, indeed, some parts of it are so contrived as that it shall be impossible to understand them on a first perusal (as in that behaviour and those allusions of Romney, in his interview with Aurora, which result from his blindness, of which we are ignorant). The poem is worth reading once,

twice, thrice, oftener, till you do understand the full force and significance of all it contains: but it is a long poem, a very long poem; and we fear Mrs. Browning would not be pleased with a statistical return of those who have received from it only confused impressions and a brief excitement of the imagination and feelings. It would have been a greater, a simpler, a truer, and a more valuable poem, if it had been compressed within one-fourth of its present limits. Nor is its author unwise only in her excess of detail and exuberance of secondary matter. It was necessary that she should deal with human beings; but it was not necessary that she should display them by dramatic forms, and so conduct her story as to lay bare the most prominent defect of her poetic genius in its most undisguised nakedness.

There are many persons in the poem who are made to express themselves in the first person; but characters, except in brief description, there are none,—nothing but vague hazy embodiments given to certain contrasted sets of ideas. They do not deceive us for an instant. We never think of them as individuals who have, or ever have had, life, as we do of Agamemnon, or Hamlet, or Cuddie Headrigg; we see them at once to be only some other person's notion of a person;—phantoms which may have had flesh-and-blood antecedents, but now walk only in books, and whose vaporous unsubstantial forms betray them to be but reveries of the poet, simulating speech and motion. Aurora Leigh, the poetess, tells her own story; and yet even with her you never feel that you know her personally, or have pierced beyond one or two of the marked and prominent characteristics of her nature. You are conscious that she is but the representative of the real poet behind; and that she comes forward only to give a voice to the inner convictions, the intellectual questionings and problems, and the heart's solutions of the artist who employs her. The poetess, the philanthropist, the woman of fashion, and the vagrant child,

all express themselves in exactly the same language, use the same tropes, the same recondite imagery, and are on the same high level of intellectual cultivation and vigorous thought. The child of brutal parents, kept pure by the instincts of her own nature, but owing her only intellectual discipline to stray half-torn volumes, picked up from wandering pedlars, does not scruple to talk of "madrepores," and invariably employs more recondite forms of expression than would be used by one woman in a hundred of the educated classes of England.

The characters were meant to be distinct, nay, were no doubt conceived as distinct; but in passing through the author's mind, they have retained so much of her, and lost so much of what is distinctive, that they seem only like shadows of herself in various attitudes and different lights. In actually describing what she has seen, however, whether in nature or in human character, Mrs. Browning is often very successful. Lord Howe is well touched:

"Let me draw Lord Howe;
 A born aristocrat, bred radical,
 And educated socialist, who still
 Goes floating, on traditions of his kind,
 Across the theoretic flood from France,—
 Though, like a drenched Noah on a rotten deck,
 Scarce safer for his place there. He, at least,
 Will never land on Ararat, he knows,
 To recommence the world on the old plan:
 Indeed, he thinks, said world had better end:
 He sympathises rather with the fish
 Outside, than with the drowned paired beasts within
 Who cannot couple again or multiply:
 And that's the sort of Noah he is, Lord Howe.
 He never could be any thing complete,
 Except a loyal, upright gentleman,
 A liberal landlord, graceful diner-out,
 And entertainer more than hospitable,
 Whom authors dine with and forget the port.
 Whatever he believes, and it is much,
 But no-wise certain . . . now here and now there, . . .
 He still has sympathies beyond his creed,

Diverting him from action. In the House,
 No party counts upon him, and all praise
 All like his books too, (he has written books)
 Which, good to lie beside a bishop's chair,
 So oft outreach themselves with jets of fire
 At which the foremost of the progressists
 May warm audacious hands in passing by.
 —Of stature over-tall, lounging for ease;
 Light hair, that seems to carry a wind in it,
 And eyes that, when they look on you, will lean
 Their whole weight half in indolence, and half
 In wishing you unmitigated good,
 Until you know not if to flinch from him
 Or thank him.—'Tis Lord Howe."

Marian, too, the daughter of the people, is admirably described,—rather, we should say, admirably conceived; and the fine and most truthful and delicate conception glimmers through the brief description. But, unfortunately, Mrs. Browning will not rely on description; and when Marian comes to speak for herself we are utterly thrown out, and a nondescript confused image of a somewhat affected young woman, of vast powers of poetical expression, usurps the place of that true idea we in vain attempt to hold steadily before us. Thus she paints the personal appearance of Marian:

" No wise beautiful

Was Marian Erle. She was not white nor brown,
 But could look either, like a mist that changed
 According to being shone on more or less.
 The hair, too, ran its opulence of curls
 In doubt 'twixt dark and bright, nor left you clear
 To name the colour. Too much hair perhaps
 (I'll name a fault here) for so small a head,
 Which seemed to droop on that side and on this,
 As a full-blown rose uneasy with its weight,
 Though not a breath should trouble it. Again,
 The dimple in the cheek had better gone
 With redder, fuller rounds: and somewhat large
 The mouth was, though the milky little teeth
 Dissolved it to so infantine a smile!
 For soon it smiled at me; the eyes smiled too,
 But 'twas as if remembering they had wept,
 And knowing they should, some day, weep again."

It seems strange, that one who can both observe and describe so accurately, should stand always at arm's length from other minds, and should be powerless to paint people as they appear to themselves, or to make them paint themselves as they appear to others. The only trace of dramatic power occurs now and then in some brief flash, which is, indeed, only the shining of a spark of accurate observation, and makes the surrounding dimness more noticeable; as when, in Marian's letter, she says:

"I'm poor at writing at the best,—and yet
I tried to make my *g*'s the way you showed."

As the theme of the poem deepens, and the faulty artist forgets herself in the true poet, the verse runs smooth and clear; the startling, jarring metaphors are subdued to the element in which they move, and the verse is no unfit medium for the lofty matter.

In the concluding passage, where Aurora learns how Romney, now blind, had ever loved her, Mrs. Browning gives a fuller voice than any other poet has ever done to the intensity of love's rapture in a woman's heart:

"But oh, the night! oh, bitter-sweet! oh, sweet!
O dark, O moon and stars, O ecstasy
Of darkness! O great mystery of love,—
In which absorbed, loss, anguish, treason's self
Enlarges rapture,—as a pebble dropt
In some full wine-cup over-brims the wine!
While we two sate together, leaned that night
So close, my very garments crept and thrilled
With strange electric life; and both my cheeks
Grew red, then pale, with touches from my hair
In which his breath was; while the golden moon
Was hung before our faces as the badge
Of some sublime inherited despair,
Since ever to be seen by only one,—
A voice said, low and rapid as a sigh,
Yet breaking, I felt conscious, from a smile,—
'Thank God, who made me blind, to make me see!
Shine on, Aurora, dearest light of souls,

Which rul'st for evermore both day and night !
I am happy.'

I flung closer to his breast,
As sword that, after battle, flings to sheath ;
And, in that hurtle of united souls,
The mystic motions which in common moods
Are shut beyond our sense, broke in on us,
And, as we sate, we felt the old earth spin,
And all the starry turbulence of worlds
Swing round us in their audient circles, till
If that same golden moon were overhead
Or if beneath our feet, we did not know."

Altogether a noble poem, and every where throughout it the poet shows greater than her work. Indeed, given a poem of certain excellence, and the degree in which it shows defectiveness in the interpretative faculty (in which we have described Mrs. Browning as wanting) is but a measure of the higher order of personal qualities necessarily present in the poet ; who by that very defectiveness is thrown back more than another on the resources of his own mind and nature. Mrs. Browning is conscientiously devoted to her art ; it is no by-work to her, but the deliberately undertaken business of her life. There is no reason why she should not gain a much higher degree of artistic unity and simplicity than she now possesses. The fountains of her genius show an un-failing freshness and force ; and high as *Aurora Leigh* stands, its author may live to look back on it as only a stepping-stone to the highest things of which she is capable.

THE CONVERSATION AND POETRY OF ROGERS.*

[April 1856.]

THERE has been much talk of a consolidation of the statutes ; when shall we have a consolidation of Whig anecdotes ? A Holland-House Joe Miller, bringing up all the dinner-talk of that party to the present date, is greatly needed. Such a work, forming a general body of reference, from which moreover it should be as fatal to quote as from the old body of English wit comprised in the original of that name, would constitute at once a valuable repertory of amusement and a much-needed barrier against boredom. At present Whig wit is in much the same state as English common law, it must be gathered from a mass of independent reports ; and the novelty and parentage of a joke is as laborious a thing to ascertain as the truth and authority of a position in law. Let the thing be done thoroughly and once for all ; let us have the remaining two volumes of Mr. Moore's diary ; print two more, if it is absolutely necessary ; publish all his invitations to dinner, with copies of the answers ; put in his butcher's bill ; furnish more full details about Bessy's accouchements ; ransack the drawers of every Whig nobleman and distinguished literary character of liberal principles ; exhaust the memory of all dowager duchesses and diners-out ; invite all the filial spirits who think justice has never been done by an ungrateful world to the hero of the family to say all they have to say ; let there be nothing left that can possibly be printed ;—and then let some industrious man, not naturally given to despond-

* *Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers.* London, Edward Moxon, 1856.

ency, collate the authorities; or appoint a commission, if you will, and let the puns and the personal reminiscences remain in abeyance while its members meet. Only let Lord John be excluded, or he will infallibly insist on all being published *in extenso*, and add notes explanatory of the jokes.

Holland House has not been happy in its reporters: we have had brilliant general descriptions of the host, the hostess, and the guests, and enthusiastic generalising on the uniform feast of reason and flow of soul which prevailed; but of all this nothing has survived but a few personal anecdotes and a great deal of indifferent wit. In fact, though the beginning of this century was rich in conversational talent, the kind of conversation was not that which will bear reporting. A ready and well-stored memory, and a quick and lively wit, were the essentials of success, and so perhaps they should be in general conversation; but then, general conversation ought to be allowed to expire with the occasion. Small gossip about individuals, interesting and amusing while the subjects are fresh and present to the minds of all the hearers, become the worst of annoyances when coldly inflicted in print on a new generation.

The only table-talk really worth preserving is that which reflects an individual mind of capacity and originality enough to let fall, even in its lighter moments, matter pregnant with thought and observation. Some men, like Selden and Johnson, survive mainly in the records of their conversation. And sometimes, as in the case of Coleridge, the sayings thus rescued from oblivion are not only of the highest value in themselves, but are a sort of key to the mind of the speaker, and corrective and interpretative of his written works.

The present work is not of this class. It would more properly have been entitled *Table-Silence* of Samuel Rogers; for in it is recorded, not what Samuel Rogers thought and said, but what Samuel Rogers had heard

other people say. From a man whose taste and connoisseurship were so eminent, readers will be apt to expect some nicety of criticism in painting and poetry. They must be content to suffer disappointment. A few casual expressions of likings and dislikings, a few minute cavillings and trite remarks, make up the sum of Mr. Rogers's conversation on this subject. It by no means follows, that because a man has no power to criticise he has no faculty of enjoyment, or even great accuracy and delicacy in the perception of beauty and skill in art. But to have a taste so good as Mr. Rogers's undoubtedly was in the main, and a critical judgment of this calibre, indicates that he was not much in the habit of bringing his thoughts to bear on his intuitions.

Anecdotes and characteristic sayings of the men by whom Rogers was surrounded are what we next look for, when we find there is nothing characteristic of the man's own mode of thinking except that negative trait itself. We are not surprised that there should be very few of these. Men do not easily conceive that the conversation and demeanour of those with whom they live on the same level and in daily intercourse can be worth noting and remembering. Besides, Mr. Rogers was a little of a virtuoso as well as a man of taste, and little bits of out-of-the-way personal information and gossip had more charm for him, and left a more permanent impression on him, than the conversation of Lamb, and Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and Mackintosh. Characteristic traits of great men, however minute, are always worth preserving. We gratefully receive—we only too eagerly grasp at—the smallest incidents or sayings which can help us to give greater vividness or truth to the figure existing in the imagination. But then the recorded traits must have something characteristic about them; it is sufficient to have one or two of a class; selected without discrimination, and reiterated without mercy, they are perhaps more trying to the temper than any other reading. That Fox

had not been able to read Mickle's *Lusiad* through; that he thought Robertson's *Columbus* pleasingly written; how Lord Holland looked at breakfast; what Tierney thought of Burke's eloquence; whether Sheridan had 200*l.* sent him by the Prince; whether more than 200*l.*; whether it might not have been 200*l.* with an intimation that there was more if he wished for it; whether it might not be an annuity;—these and such-like petty details and trivial discussions are trying enough: but when the persons themselves are as little important as the incidents are significant, then a reader resigns. We would at any time rather read the Supplement to the *Times* than much of Mr. Rogers's *Table-Talk*. What on earth do we care about Hoppner's "awful temper"? or how can any man conscientiously ask us to pay for the printing of this sort of thing?

"Lord Holland and Lord Lansdowne having expressed a wish to be introduced to Cumberland, I invited all the three to dine with me. It happened, however, that the two lords paid little or no attention to Cumberland (though he said several very good things),—scarcely speaking to him the whole time: something had occurred in the House which occupied all their thoughts; and they retired to a window, and discussed it."

We have never been able ourselves to find much satisfaction in seeing a person who has simply seen another. That degree of approximation to the king which consists in your brother having seen the Duke of York is generally deemed unsatisfactory, and only becoming in an Irishman to boast of. From Mr. Rogers we learn that

"Sir George Beaumont, when a young man, was introduced at Rome to an old painter, who in his youth had known an old painter, who had seen Claude and Gaspar Poussin riding out, in a morning, on mules, and furnished with palettes, &c., to make sketches in the Campagna."

Throw in another handful or two of old painters, you might see Zeuxis; exchange them for gardeners, and you

may get a vicarious view of Adam himself. This process is like constructing an opaque telescope to see an invisible object ; or like travelling to York by conversation with the coachman who drives the first stage out of London.

"If the favour," says the editor of the last English *Table-Talk* that deserved to be printed,—“if the favour shown to several modern instances of works nominally of the same description as the present were alone to be considered, it might seem that the old maxim, that nothing ought to be said of the dead but what is good, is in a fair way of being dilated into an understanding that every thing is good that has been said by the dead.” The present editor appears to be very much of this opinion ; and when we learn that the present is a selection from a large mass of memoranda of Mr. Rogers’s conversation, we have no difficulty in believing a fact we learn from the preface, that he “sometimes had the mortification of finding impatient listeners.” Yet it would be unjust to deny that this memorial of his sayings contains some curious and characteristic anecdotes, and one or two good sayings. Gray’s notion about keeping a dog is new, we think ; it throws a ray both on the coldness and the cautiousness of his nature :

“At Brighton, during my youth, I became acquainted with a lawyer who had known Gray. He said that Gray’s pronunciation was very affected, *e.g.* ‘What *naise* (noise) is that?’

Henley (the translator of Beckford’s *Vathek*) was one morning paying a visit to Gray, when a dog came into the room. ‘Is that your dog?’ said Henley. ‘No,’ replied Gray : ‘do you suppose that *I* would keep an animal *by which I might possibly lose my life?*’”

We will omit Mr. Rogers’s criticism on Gray, and only cite the following, which gives a lively picture of Wordsworth pouncing upon his own property as it were ; for whether Gray took it from Oldham or not, the phrase and idea are both so eminently Wordsworthian, that we

are not surprised at his feeling as if he had been robbed of them :

“I once read Gray’s *Ode to Adversity* to Wordsworth; and at the line,—

‘And leave us leisure to be good,’—

Wordsworth exclaimed, ‘I am quite sure *that* is not original; Gray could not have hit upon it.’”

Part of the book is occupied with scattered reminiscences of old social habits; but generally either vague or trivial. Thus, Rogers remembers the time when every gentleman’s family had only one large cotton umbrella. He has seen ladies and gentlemen walking on the pier at Calais with small fox-muffs; and he has heard thus much of Vauxhall and Ranelagh :

“By the by, General Fitzpatrick remembered the time when St. James’s Street used to be crowded with the carriages of the ladies and gentlemen who were walking in the Mall,—the ladies with their heads in full dress, and the gentlemen carrying their hats under their arms. The proprietors of Ranelagh and Vauxhall used to send decoy-ducks among them, that is, persons attired in the height of fashion, who every now and then would exclaim in a very audible tone, ‘What charming weather for Ranelagh’ or ‘for Vauxhall!’

Ranelagh was a very pleasing place of amusement. There persons of inferior rank mingled with the highest nobility of Britain. All was so orderly and still, that you could hear the *whishing* sound of the ladies’ trains, as the immense assembly walked round and round the room. If you chose, you might have tea, which was served up in the neatest equipage possible. The price of admission was half-a-crown. People generally went to Ranelagh between nine and ten o’clock.”

This is a lively and startling picture of the indiscriminating severity of our criminal code at no very distant period :

“When I was a lad, I recollect seeing a whole cartful of young girls, in dresses of various colours, on their way to be executed at Tyburn. They had all been condemned, on one indictment, for having been concerned in (that is, perhaps,

for having been spectators of) the burning of some houses during Lord George Gordon's riots. It was quite horrible.—Greville was present at one of the trials consequent on these riots, and heard several boys sentenced, to their own excessive amazement, to be hanged. 'Never,' said Greville with great *naïveté*, 'did I see boys *cry so*.' "

Mr. Rogers evidently had little or no power of observing men; his great opportunities were wasted on him; he is always occupied with little isolated facts *about* men. In his life, in his poetry, in his conversation, he is always the same; he is curious in the husks of things; he was provided with plenty of nuts through life, and he spent it in cracking them, dilating upon and preserving the shells, instead of eating and digesting the kernels. Coleridge and he are the two opposite poles of mental constitution. "I can take no interest whatever," says Coleridge, "in hearing or saying any thing merely as a fact—merely as having happened. It must refer to something within me before I can regard it with any curiosity or care. My mind is always energetic—I don't mean energetic; I require in every thing what I may call *propriety*—that is, a reason why the thing is at all, and why it is *there* or *then* rather than elsewhere or at another time." You cannot depend even on the facts preserved by such a mind as that of Rogers; not because they are not exactly observed and recorded—they will probably be both; but because such a mind has nothing to guide its selection, and you have no security that the evidence is to the purpose. All that is of the pith of the matter in hand may have been lost, and only the accidental or even exceptional incident connected with it preserved. The observations on persons of a man who has no insight into character, or pleasure in the study of it, are of as little value as the observations of a man unskilled in science on the natural history of an unexplored country. Men of this sort are better fitted for the intercourse of society than those who think they possess nothing till they have

made it a part of themselves. The former give and take knowledge, such as it is ; anecdote and wit are reflected quickly from them : they give sparks of their own in the collision of society. Such a man can say what he has to say in those interstices which a dinner admits of, whereas the other requires the world to sit round listening while he expounds his convictions and limits his theories ; but the latter gathers water like a well, filtered and stored up, while the former runs away like a brook sparkling and bubbling over the stones, and after fifty years of familiar intercourse with the best society in England leaves the contents of such a volume as this as the fruits of his experience.

Of course Rogers talked in society better than he is here represented as doing. You cannot reproduce in this way the conversation of such a man ; not that Rogers was a conversationalist, but he had vigour and quickness of mind enough to hold his own in general intercourse ; he was industrious in collecting and agreeable in imparting all the little *ana* of the day ; he was sensible, rich, and well informed, and he could say caustic things of his acquaintance, which always makes a man agreeable among common friends. He was a kind-hearted man, but he was bilious and thin-skinned ; he was not without a real enjoyment of excellence, but his taste on the whole was more of that negative kind which shows itself in sensitiveness to any breach in the harmony and propriety that it loves. Mr. Rogers carried this very far. He said that to hear the modern pronunciation, 'balcōny' for 'balcōny,' made him sick. A susceptibility of this sort is apt to result in a critical and cavilling temper, which, when it exercises itself on friends, is always amusing, but not always amiable. Byron wrote a very savage personal satire on his friend. It is too bad to be quoted entire ; but some lines give what we apprehend is, if an over-drawn, still a characteristic picture of the tone Rogers's conversation was apt to assume :

“Hear his tone (which is to talking
 That which creeping is to walking),
 Now on all-fours, now on tiptoe ;
 Hear the tales he lends his lip to,—
 Little hints of heavy scandals ;
 Every friend in turn he handles ;
 All which women or which men do
 Glides forth in an innuendo ;
 Clothed in odds-and-ends of humour,
 From devices down to dresses,
 Women’s frailties, man’s excesses ;
 All which life presents of evil
 Makes for him a constant revel.”

Medwin has a story of Byron’s putting this satire, of whose abusive bitterness the above lines give no idea, under the cushion of the sofa when Rogers came to see him at Pisa, and seating him on it, while talking in the most friendly way to him. The story is not an improbable one ; it is in character with Byron’s mischievous spirit : a gentleman could not have done it ; but Byron was only an outside gentleman, and ungenerous and vulgar in his heart’s core.

*a banker's
 opinion.*

Rogers, we fancy, was not very much at ease among the poets and men of genius. They were too much in earnest for him. He loved the easy polished tone of well-bred society ; he preferred talk to discussion ; and Luttrell’s brilliant flashes, or Bobus Smith’s quotations, had more charms for him than Wordsworth’s serious disquisitions, Lamb’s stuttering wit, or Byron’s arrogant and clever assertions. They put him out, too, in little things ; and how strong an impression such things made on him we see by the hold they retained on his memory. Once Sheridan was talking at Rogers’s house “in his very best style,” [every thing going off as well as possible] “when, to my great vexation, Moore (who has that sort of restlessness which never allows him to be happy where he is) interrupted Sheridan, by exclaiming, ‘Isn’t it time to go to Lydia White’s?’” Rogers travelled with Mackintosh ; but they did not hit it off together. At Lau-

sanne Mackintosh wouldn't care to borrow the *Decline and Fall*, and read the concluding passages on the very spot where they were written; and at Geneva he did not scruple to appropriate Rogers's carpet-bag, and fill it with newly-purchased books. You can fancy the distracted man in the midst of his shirts and toothbrushes, and Mackintosh waiting for him in the carriage below, quietly reading, with the bag on the opposite seat. Uvedale Price once called forth all his ingenuity to get him out of the house; and Coleridge would sit all day after breakfast talking matter of which neither he nor Wordsworth could understand a word. Still worse were the metaphysicians :

"When I lived in the Temple, Mackintosh and Richard Sharp used to come to my chambers, and stay there for hours, talking metaphysics. One day they were so intent on their 'first cause,' 'spirit,' and 'matter,' that they were unconscious of my having left them, paid a visit, and returned! I was a little angry at this, and, to show my indifference about them, I sat down and wrote letters, without taking any notice of them."

When on one occasion he asked Sharp a metaphysical question, Sharp politely told him he was not one of the only two men with whom he talked metaphysics. "It so offended my sister," says Rogers, "that she said I ought immediately to have ordered a post-chaise and left him there." He went with Byron to the Pitti Palace at Florence; but his rude and callous friend sat down in a corner; "and when," says Rogers, "I called out to him, 'What a noble Andrea del Sarto!' the only answer I received was his muttering a passage from the *Vicar of Wakefield*,—'Upon being asked how he had been taught the art of a *cognoscente* so very suddenly, he assured me that nothing was more easy. The whole secret consisted in a strict adherence to two rules; the one, always to observe, the picture might have been better if the painter had taken more pains, and the other to praise the works

of Pietro Perugino.'” Byron and Rogers were two spirits not very well calculated for amicable intercourse, and their friendship seems to have consisted in quarrels overnight, and reconciliations in the morning. Indeed, Byron was a man with whom it was almost impossible for any one to continue long in harmony. Shelley, with his sweetness and true nobleness, his firm will and high courage, was the only one of his associates to whom Byron bowed; and even that superiority was one he never acknowledged even to his own heart. That he often indemnified himself for the secret feeling by rude taunts, and a tone half-jesting, half-insulting (as in a scene Mr. Rogers was witness to), we can well believe. Such things fell off from Shelley’s quiet dignity without touching him; he never descended into the arena of Byron’s personal squabbling:

“One day, during dinner, at Pisa, when Shelley and Trelawney were with us, Byron chose to run down Shakespeare (for whom he, like Sheridan, either had, or pretended to have, little admiration). I said nothing. But Shelley immediately took up the defence of the great poet, and conducted it in his usual meek yet resolute manner, unmoved by the rude things with which Byron interrupted him,—‘Oh, that’s very well for an atheist,’ &c.”

Mr. Rogers’s stock of *facetiae* appears to have been an indifferent selection, with few claims to novelty; nor was he himself very successful in this line, if we may judge from the only specimen preserved in these memoranda.

Mr. Rogers’s own *bon-mot*:

“A man who attempts to read all the new publications must often do as a flea does—*skip*.”

An epigram by Erskine, which Mr. Rogers thought “far from bad:”

“The French have taste in all they do,
Which we are quite without;
For Nature, that to them gave *goût*,
To us gave only gout.”

Instance of wit in Mr. Canning :

"I once mentioned to Canning the anecdote, that, while Gray was at Peter House, Cambridge, some young men of the college having learned that he had a fire-escape in his rooms, alarmed him in the middle of the night by a cry of 'fire!'—and that presently Gray descended from the window by a ladder of ropes, and tumbled into a tub of water, which the rogues had placed there;—upon which, Canning added, that 'they had made a mistake in calling out 'fire,' when they meant to cry 'water.'"

It is not very easy for an editor to know what good sayings are old and what new; but there are things here which any Court would take judicial cognisance of as matters of universal notoriety, and many others which have only just appeared in contemporaneous publications. At any rate, quasi-witty things, faded epigrams, fickle anomalous pleasantries, and defunct repartees, ought not to be disinterred. It is like relighting a half-smoked cigar. A humorous thing, on the contrary, is never old. There is a venerable story (we feel grateful to Mr. Moore for reviving it) of a man who came vexed with losses out of a gaming-room, and finding another at the top of the stairs tying his shoe, kicked him down the whole flight, saying, "Damn you, you're *always* tying your shoe!" You cannot exhaust that sort of thing; the oftener you hear it, the better you appreciate it; you laugh when you think of it to yourself. So it is with most of Sydney Smith's sayings: they enjoy perpetual youth;* no one need be afraid of telling them over and over again. Mr. Rogers has a right to tell the story about his own dining-room :

"At one time, when I gave a dinner, I used to have

* *Sydney Smith's Life*, by his daughter, deserves to be noted as an exception to the flagrant voluminousness of modern biographies. The first volume contains a life-like picture, within just limits, of a man whose portraiture was well worth preserving.

candles placed all round the dining-room, and high up, in order to show off the pictures. I asked Smith how he liked that plan. 'Not at all,' he replied; 'above, there is a blaze of light, and below, nothing but darkness and gnashing of teeth.'

When his physician advised him to 'take a walk upon an empty stomach,' Smith asked, 'Upon whose?'

He said that '*his* idea of heaven was eating *pâtés de foie gras* to the sound of trumpets.'"

There is an exquisite incongruity in this last idea; the mode employed of raising an earthly enjoyment into the heavenly category is amazingly felicitous and absurd. The account of the king's consternation at being asked how he was, is amusing enough, and within the limits of Mr. Rogers's own experience. It may serve to conclude our extracts:

"Once, when in company with William the Fourth, I quite forgot that it is against all etiquette to ask a sovereign about his health; and, on his saying to me, 'Mr. Rogers, I hope you are well,' I replied, 'Very well, I thank your Majesty: *I trust that your Majesty is quite well also.*' Never was a king in greater confusion; he didn't know where to look, and stammered out, 'Yes,—yes,—only a little rheumatism.'"

"I regret," says Mr. Rogers, "that Moore should have printed those memoranda which prove how painfully Sheridan elaborated his compositions; for though the judicious few will feel that Sheridan was quite right in doing so, the public generally will think the less of him for it." That this principle of only telling so much of a man as will make the public think well of him is a false one few will be inclined to deny. Still, we cannot think there is any moral obligation to bring a man before the public at all, when it involves the necessity of exhibiting him in so poor an aspect.

Perhaps the present editor thought it a *suppressio veri* to leave Mr. Rogers the reputation of a clever man and a good talker. If the report here furnished be at all a just one, never was any one more conclusively stripped of all claim to more than average mental ability.

The reputation which Mr. Rogers first gained as the author of the *Pleasures of Memory* was well deserved. It was,—putting Cowper aside as exceptional,—incomparably the best poem which had for many years been produced in the existing school of the eighteenth century.

Byron was in the habit of building a poetical triangle, and placing Rogers at the head of it (except Scott). This was partly irony and absurdity, and partly a legitimate consequence of his maxim, that greater honour was due to the more methodical and exact versification of Pope's school than to the freedom of his own contemporaries. At one time he calls him "the Nestor of poets," "our poetical papa," &c., and says he and Crabbe were the fathers of the modern school, which is a totally false idea: his true ground for admiration, however (if he really felt it), is to be found in another expression, "He is the last of the *best* school," that is, the last of the old school. And this is exactly Rogers's position. His poems are the last bright flicker of an expiring flame. To understand the attention they excited, we must call to mind what the condition of that school then was. Never since the first fullness of its tide had the art of poetry ebbed so low in England. It had been falling steadily for a hundred years.

Wordsworth made a fierce and just onslaught on the technical diction he found holding sway over English poetry. But this tyranny of restricted expression and ideas was not the cause, but the consequence, of the absence of great poets; when these appeared, they broke without an effort through its flimsy and tasteless canons. When any subject lays a strong hold on the imagination of a man of creative instincts, he strives to give it an outward embodiment, and if verse is the form he chooses, or is compelled to take, he is a poet; but there is all the difference in the world between the necessity to express what verse alone can adequately give voice to, and the desire to write verses suggesting a search for something

to say in verse. The latter desire will produce poems too ; but they are different from those written by the first-described class of poets not in quality so much as in kind. Such verses, though of a high class, are all Pope's poems, except perhaps the *Dunciad* ; and, in fact, from the death of Dryden to near the end of the eighteenth century, it is scarcely possible to name a man who wrote poetry because necessity was laid upon him so to write. At the same time, verse was in request ; and in the absence of powerful imaginations, a technical system of versification and expression grew up. It is always so. In all cases, in art as well as in religion, where the life-giving spirit grows faint, the form gains a factitious importance. It is at once more sharply defined and more zealously insisted on. Of course it is not said that all poets can be strictly divided into these two classes ; but they lean to one or the other. Perhaps all poets are at some times verse-makers ; though the reverse is not true. Certainly, throughout the eighteenth century verse-making predominated largely over imaginative poetry. The exceptions are partial. Goldsmith wore his chains with so easy a grace, that you scarcely perceive them. Thomson was an imaginative poet, but had barely power to free himself, and did not shake the system. Gray, too, was a poet within a narrow sphere, but of that order to whom a strict slavery of form is an advantage ; to him stays were an assistance in walking. Collins and Chatterton glimmered through the twilight. Burns first walked free ; but, apart from the greatness of his genius, he was pretty much out of the range of the trammels in his Scotch poems. Fortunately, he did *not* take Mr. Mackenzie's advice to model himself on Mrs. John Hunter. Cowper was of the verse-making class ; he is generally looked on as first to lead the way to genuineness and freedom. If he was so, it was not wittingly. No man ever wrote more directly for the sake of making verses than Cowper, or more sedulously clipped and fashioned

his lines, though not always by the approved standard ; but he had an inborn simplicity and truthfulness of nature which reflected itself in all he wrote. He had no great impulse to say any thing ; but he could not deal in vague commonplaces, or say other than what he had really felt and thought. He wrote simply, not because he saw the vices of the established mode, but because his moral instincts would not let him do otherwise. But close upon his heels came a race too large for the yoke, and too strong to endure it. Wordsworth found that his delicate intuitions could not gain utterance at all in those established generalities which had so long served the necessities of more commonplace genius. He was the first clearly to perceive the mischief, and openly to denounce it. He did not build up a true theory of expression, but he did much to destroy a false one. Coleridge, in his early poems, still struggles half-bound in the old fetters ; but he was not long in shaking himself loose. That Southey, in the security of his own self-estimate, should acknowledge none but self-imposed restrictions in art, is not strange. Sudden and far flashed the new dayspring. But when Rogers was writing the *Pleasures of Memory*, these and those other equal and lesser names, so soon to "flame in the forehead of the morning sky," lay clustered below the horizon. It was the darkness of the hour before dawn, with only a faint gleam or two, a stray heralding of day, glimmering here and there in the east. Things poetical were at their worst.

We may dispute, if we will, the claim of Pope and Johnson to be great poets in the highest sense ; but it is impossible to deny that they were great minds : there was vigour and capacity in all they wrote ; and the general fashion of their time demanded sense, and thoughts at least, if not thought, from an author. But a later time was forced to content itself with the feeble sweetness of Shenstone, the flatulent pomposity of Mason, the vapid flow of Hayley, and all the artificial sentiment and

flat expression that is to be found in Dodsley and elsewhere. Long after the prophets of a new life had made their voices heard, the race of minor poetasters pursued the old and beaten pathways. There was a wretched affectation of tenderness of sentiment and simplicity of taste. Maudlin elegies, tributes to friendship, lugubrious ballads, and staggering paralytic odes, were the fashion. Wishy-washy matter was expressed in a cold and confined phraseology. Unless some genius had broken the charm, not only the phraseology, but, as a necessary consequence, the ideas adapted to verse would have become fixed and limited. Already a number of artificial proprieties had established themselves. Whoever came to your door, whether a pedlar, or a vagrant, or a tourist,—you could call him but one thing—he was a “pilgrim.” The patriot was a favourite person in those days, and was always found ploughing when most wanted; if we may believe what we read, every county in England was infested with hermits; if you went into a neighbouring wood, you might be pretty sure to find a disconsolate man there with one arm round an urn, who would seize you by the button, and in thirty or forty monotonous stanzas tell the tragical results of his daughter’s attachment. It would be difficult to find a father in the poetry of that day who was not “hoary.” Blessings abounded, and there was a run on moral deathbeds. Faithful dogs then had their day; and on the graves of dogs and men alike flourished urns and epitaphs and inscriptions. Grottoes, cells, and cots, were the usual habitations of authors in verse; and their food, though not accurately defined, appears to have been strictly vegetable. Sensibility was the proper thing,—the poet liked to call himself “pensive;” a hero (who was always either a youth or a swain) was fitted out with a tear in either eye, and heroines were reservoirs with difficulty restrained from overflow. A foolish affectation of rusticity, and praise of a certain stock poetic country-life, was a very common feature.

And extending through, and giving its deadening tone to all minor features, there was an absence of all particularity, a habit of dealing with vague generalities, instead of seizing the individual aspects of things. No poet looked at life and Nature for himself, and said what he found there simply and truly; few looked on them at all, for the received commonplaces were to be had with less trouble; nothing was real except an occasional gleam of personal feeling.

Mr. Rogers's own poem, the *Epistle to a Friend*, though not without beauties of its own, affords a striking example of the artificial formulæ in which it was then fashionable to invest your ideas. That poem, he tells us, was designed "to illustrate the virtue of true taste, and to show how little she requires to secure not only the comforts, but even the elegancies of life." For this purpose he avails himself of a part of his own habits and experience; but instead of giving them in their truth and reality, he deems it incumbent on him to put them in a certain poetical frame: we must get at something like what Pope, or Boileau, or Horace, have written. And first, a serious poetical epistle must necessarily come from the country. Why, we now find it hard to conceive. Why should Mr. Rogers go out of his way to swear by the country mouse, when living after the town one? Why, when happily at home amongst his friends, with metropolitan comforts about him, should he find it necessary to represent himself as a "village friend," occupying a "hermit cell" in a remote part of the country, and talk as if "selected shelves," engravings, a "thatched bath," a dumb waiter, and looking out of window, were the certain and sole conditions of true happiness and self-respect? Why talk of an easy round in the best London society as

"the joyless glare, the maddening strife,
And all the dull impertinence of life"?

It makes one suspect the Whig dinners were not so

amusing as we are taught to believe ; but it fails to convince us that Mr. Rogers really found (as he intimates) a permanent source of enjoyment in dining or supping alone on apples and pears. And why is a supper called a "cheerful rite" and a "frugal banquet"? and why, because Horace speaks of *dapes inemptas*, should Mr. Rogers describe any of his meals as "pure and unbought"? At the very best they could only be "pure and unpaid for,"—no advantage to so rich a poet. Why, again, should Mr. Rogers, in those chirping little verses we learned in our childhood, wish for a cot beside a hill? How unhappy he would have been there! Why describe himself as united in the bonds of holy matrimony to a woman in a russet gown and blue apron? He may have expressed to Lady Jersey, as he tells us he once did, "with great sincerity," his regret at being unmarried; but can he ever in his wildest dreams have contemplated such a union as that without abhorrence?

The lines *On a Tear* do not by any means afford a fair specimen of Mr. Rogers's powers; but they give some idea of the sort of things he wrote when most under the dominion of the taste of his earlier days.

"Oh, that the chemist's magic art
Could crystallise this sacred treasure!
Long should it glitter near my heart,
A secret source of pensive pleasure.

The little brilliant, ere it fell,
Its lustre caught from Chloe's eye;
Then, trembling, left its coral cell—
The spring of sensibility!

Sweet drop of pure and pearly light!
In thee the rays of virtue shine;
More calmly clear, more mildly bright,
Than any gem that gilds the mine.

Benign restorer of the soul!
Who ever fly'st to bring relief,
When first we feel the rude control
Of love or pity, joy or grief.

The sage's and the poet's theme,
In every clime, in every age,—
Thou charm'st in fancy's idle dream,
In reason's philosophic page.

That very law* which moulds a tear,
And bids it trickle from its source,—
That law preserves the earth a sphere,
And guides the planets in their course."

Though not always on so low a level, Mr. Rogers continued during the whole course of his long poetical career to breathe the atmosphere of the eighteenth century. Men are slow to learn of their youngers; and Mr. Rogers was not one whose temper and frame of mind were likely to render him an exception. But it is a striking evidence of the genuineness of his taste, and his power of appreciating and enjoying true excellence, that he was quick to recognise the merit of those new men whom he was so little able to emulate. He said of Wordsworth, "He deserves all his fame." And this was something for him to say. That his sympathy should have proved capable of extension to yet another race, and almost another school, is too much to expect. Such as it was, it always outwent his creative power. *Jacqueline*, an attempt to move in the free air of Walter Scott and Byron, is graceful, polished, and more easy than its author generally has the power to be; but it is mere embroidery-work, thin and finikin. In the *Columbus*, Mr. Rogers snatches at laurels far far out of his reach, and beats his flagging wings in all the suffering of fruitless effort—"fluttering in vast agony," like Peter Wilkins' rebel glumm general cut through the graundee by a sabre-stroke. In these poems, however, and even in the *Italy*, Mr. Rogers is true to old associations. He never rises above the principles and practice of his art as they were received when he began to write. In fact, his was a genius to which they were specially suited; and he gave a higher

* "The law of gravitation."

perfection than any other living man was capable of doing to certain restricted conditions of form and diction.

His was just the nature not to aim at a higher beauty, but to occupy itself in giving as much finish as possible to that which was at hand. He had no grasping and searching love of beauty. His was not a mind of that order which can enjoy great things in spite of defects; which not being blind to them, can yet bear with them. By a fastidious man, we mean one whose irritation at the presence of defects *habitually* outweighs his pleasure in beauty or excellence. Perhaps Rogers as artist was not quite a fastidious man, but he was one to value the lesser thing without blemishes above the greater thing with. He would have preferred looking on a clear-burning wax-candle to gazing on the sun with a consciousness of its spots. In the *Pleasures of Memory* he wrote a poem in which the prevailing versification was polished up to its highest pitch, whose language was without blemish according to the taste of the day—terse, harmonious, and well selected; he treated his subject pleasingly, if tritely, and disclosed affectionate feeling without false sentimentality. It is not to be wondered at that he was applauded and sought after. He fairly earned his first reputation. But that this reputation should survive in the blaze of genius which so soon after burst forth, is a fact more to be wondered at. Yet it is not difficult to perceive the reasons for it. Between himself and the new race there were few common points for comparison. They were of a higher order altogether. His claims did not practically come into collision with theirs. Had he been more on their level, his title would not have passed so unquestioned as it did. He did not render himself obnoxious to the shafts of party; and he was in habits of familiar social intercourse with so wide a range of literary men, that scarcely one could be found to whom it would not have seemed some breach of civility to criticise him openly and justly. At that time personal

considerations limited the range and dictated the tone of public criticism more powerfully than they even now do. The tone of attack was more direct, and was resented as a personal injury. If you were a bumptious warm-blooded little man, like Moore, or thought it a fine thing and incumbent on you as a gentleman, like Byron, you called out the reviewer, or said you would do so on your return to England. If your talent lay in a different line, you quarrelled with him, and made up as spiteful an epigram as you could, or otherwise took your revenge. But, owing to the above causes, Rogers escaped with a rub or two. He had many sincere adherents, and others granted his reputation as a matter of courtesy. Moreover he was much besides being a poet; and the man of taste and fashion, and the Mæcenas to whom the literary world owed much, carried off the man of letters.

At the present day, it can scarcely be denied that the rank which Rogers still nominally holds among English poets is mainly due to his not being read. His poems, associated with Stothard and Turner, lie on the table, and occur to young people who wish to make presents to one another. The book keeps the poetry alive; but the readers are pretty nearly an extinct race. With the exception of a few stragglers, Mr. Rogers survived the genuine admirers of his writings. To have disturbed the sensitive old man in his latter days by hostile criticism would have been cruel; and the world, as by one consent, respected the claims of age and a reputation sanctioned by its association in all memories with some of the foremost names in English literature: but now it can be neither unjust nor unseemly to attempt to estimate his genius, and to assign him his place in the English commonwealth of letters. A far different judgment must await him in such a comparison than when he is weighed against those who occupied the stage when he first appeared on it.

A likeness might be imagined between each of our

poets and some one of the constituent elements of landscape. Shakspeare would be the all-reflecting, all-embracing sea, unfathomable and ever fresh; Shelley the mountain-top, crowned with blue ether; Wordsworth the dewy pastures, commons, and serene wide-spreading plains; Byron a heady torrent, gleaming and swift, often foaming and chafing over stones; Milton a mighty solitary oak; Walter Scott a free-growing forest, waving its branches in inspiring morning air; Moore the restless fluttering singing-bird; Crabbe his own village; and Coleridge a gorgeous sunset, where the clouds take a glory, and over level ridges, and through rents and chasms, shines from impenetrable depths beyond, a calm undazzling fire. In such a scheme Rogers would be aptly represented by one of those would-be rustic ultra-artificial pleasure-grounds, on the elaboration of which some of our forefathers bestowed so much thought and labour; or, to give him narrower limits, he is the very image of one of the grottoes in such a place, such a one as he himself describes:

“Till o’er the mead a cool sequestered grot,
From its rich roof a sparry lustre shot;
A crystal water crossed the pebbled floor,
And on the front these simple lines it bore,
‘Hence away, nor dare intrude,’ &c.”

Wonderfully simple lines, which we need not quote; but “sparry lustre” very happily describes the main characteristics of Rogers’s poetry. Yet there is no false glitter about him, he has no purple patches: every thing is in perfect keeping. This is his highest claim to admiration, and, combined with the evenness and nicety of his versification, constitutes his great charm. His system of ornamentation is elaborate, but all is smoothed down into exquisite harmony of tone. To read him is like entering a perfectly well-furnished drawing-room,—there is an air of luxury and easy-chairs about him. Or you may compare it to rolling along a smooth road in a well-hung chariot, with a knowledge that the whole turn-out is un-

exceptionable: it is not that you pass through a particularly delightful country, or that the pace is exciting; it is partly the absence of all jar, but more the pleasurable self-identification with so finished an equipage.

Rogers prided himself on the pains he took, and very justly. No other man ever made so much of so small a poetical capital. "I was engaged on the *Pleasures of Memory* for nine years, on *Human Life* for nearly the same space of time, and *Italy* was not completed in less than sixteen years." His genius was not rich, and his taste was exacting. He wrote, he himself tells us, at the rate of four lines a day. His was not the exuberant fancy and wild luxuriance of language, which require the pruning of matured judgment and the cooler survey of a distant eye. His works did not lie by nine years to be thus judged: they were nine years in the crucible, having every phrase retraced and retouched, each epithet set in the best light, each foot in the line hammered over and weighed in the balance, and every paragraph taken to pieces and put together again. It was a painstaking process to make the most of a little. The gardeners talk of very "dressy grounds:" the *Pleasures of Memory* is a very "dressy" poem.

One inevitable consequence of all this pinching and pruning and transplanting is, that the connection between parts is obscured, the natural connecting-links broken; the sense is difficult to follow, and the poem assumes the form of ill-jointed fragments. A microscopic anxiety about details is not often combined with the power of commanding the larger proportions of a whole. "This little animal," says Mr. Rogers of the bee, "from the extreme convexity of her eye, cannot see many inches before her." Hence, while his verses flow with a wonderful smoothness and sweetness, and within certain limits with a most agreeable variety of cadence, his meaning is by no means so quickly followed. The natural sympathy which, in all true poetry, obtains between the flow of the

thought and the flow of the verse, and makes the two mutual interpreters one of the other, has been lost by frequent patching. The sense goes to the wall in these never-ceasing amendments. The assiduous self-criticiser has dwelt on the sentences so long, that a mere glance tells him the meaning they were appointed to convey; and he does not perceive that in the course of so many petty alterations it has become a good deal obscured to his readers. So often is this the case, that we defy any one to read Rogers's poetry correctly "at sight." The joints in the mosaic will infallibly trip him up. His defective composition arises often from an indiscriminating use of the parenthesis, and of the present participle in an absolute sense; but to analyse it would take us too far out of the way. Often it seems to have been arranged expressly to provide pitfalls for the reader. Almost any casual extract will serve to show that Mr. Rogers is not remarkable for lucidity of construction:

" On that ancient seat,
The seat of stone that runs along the wall,
South of the church, east of the belfry-tower
(Thou canst not miss it), in the sultry time
Would Dante sit conversing, and with those
Who little thought that in his hand he held
The balance, and assigned at his good pleasure
To each his place in the invisible world,—
To some an upper region, some a lower;
Many a transgressor sent to his account,
Long ere in Florence numbered with the dead;
The body still as full of life and stir
At home, abroad; still and as oft inclined
To eat, drink, sleep; still clad as others were,
And at noon-day, where men were wont to meet,
Met as continually; when the soul went,
Relinquished to a demon, and by him
(So says the bard, and who can read and doubt?)
Dwelt in and governed."

Again:

" And let us from the top of Fiesole,
Whence Galileo's glass by night observed

The phases of the moon, look round below
 On Arno's vale, where the dove-coloured steer
 Is ploughing up and down among the vines,
 While many a careless note is sung aloud,
 Filling the air with sweetness—and on thee,
 Beautiful Florence, all within thy walls,
 Thy groves and gardens, pinnacles and towers,
 Drawn to our feet."

The ease of the reader, we are told, is secured by the labour of the writer. Mr. Rogers (except as far as his versification goes) is not an instance of this. Goldsmith seems to have served to some extent as his model in the *Pleasures of Memory*, as Gray and Milton (from whom he often borrows lines) undoubtedly did for the *Ode to Superstition*. Rogers was flattered when D'Este called him a child of Goldsmith; but those who are curious to note the contrast between easy natural painting and constrained, hampered, artificial enamel-work may read the *Deserted Village* and the *Pleasures of Memory* together.

Again, Rogers is neither a correct nor a precise writer. Few men have taken more liberties with the English language, or have been more easily content to pen a well-sounding phrase, without asking whether it represents a definite idea or carries a poetic impression that can be grasped by the imagination. Such an assertion may be thought to require proof. It is not difficult to find it. Begin at the beginning. Take the two first lines of the *Pleasures of Memory*: they bear evidence that he was not giving expression to a distinct imaginative conception existing in his own mind, but was putting words together:

"Twilight's soft dew's steal o'er the village green,
 With magic tints to harmonise the scene."

Now any poet might have said, and many have said, the dew's steal *down* on to the green or elsewhere; but Rogers's object is to mend the language and say something a little new and perfectly well-sounding, so he says the dew's steal *o'er* the green, *i.e.* *across* the green; and this, we venture to say, is what no man ever would say who really wished

to convey a true impression of the mode in which the falling dew makes itself perceived. The next line speaks for itself. It is sheer words. Perhaps he once had present to his mind the variations of shadow, and the softening influence of growing obscurity as twilight deepens. Possibly in some former draft that idea was expressed; but now he raises utterly incongruous ideas by the words "magic tints," and attributes the effects to the dews. Go a little further—

"As jars the hinge, what sullen echoes call!
O haste, unfold the hospitable hall!
That hall where once, in antiquated state,
The chair of justice held the grave debate."

Can one *unfold* a hall? But granting that one may, is there any sense in which a chair of justice (whatever its antiquated state) can hold a grave debate? Either the words are used in their metaphorical sense of conducting a debate, in which they are not applicable to a chair, or else the chair must hold two parties, for with less it cannot embrace a debate. Did the squire and the poacher use to sit there together? That some nearly analogous expression once had a meaning is very likely; but we cannot find it here; and the more earnestly we look for it, the more it eludes us.

Take another instance from the first page and a half:

"Ye household deities! whose guardian eye
(the rhyme requires they should have but one among them)

Marked each pure thought, ere registered on high,
Still, still ye walk the consecrated ground,
And breathe the soul of Inspiration round."

He means they fill the chambers with inspiration. He might very fairly have said they breathe it round, though there still remains an inherent awkwardness in the idea of exhaling inspiration round a room; he might even have said they breathe the very essence or spirit of it round:

but strain the metaphor a little further, call it soul instead of essence, and do all in your power to personify inspiration by the aid of a capital I, and you have a ludicrous image: one set of persons going about exhaling the soul of another person. The man of decorative taste is pleased with the refined heightening of tone; a sensitive imagination would have shrunk instinctively from the outraged metaphor. In the same way, we have often heard of darkness shrouding, or of the shroud of darkness covering a thing; but Mr. Rogers oversteps a limit which a real poet would have felt, when he says—

“Grim darkness furls his leaden shroud.”

This is one of those fine things to which it is not easy to attach an idea. In one of the notes to the *Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers* there is the following story, connected with a very similar outburst in Campbell. Mr. Rogers says, “His *Pleasures of Hope* is no great favourite with me.” On which the editor remarks in a note:

“And it was much less so with Wordsworth, who criticised it to me nearly *verbatim* as follows; nor could his criticism, I apprehend, be easily refuted. ‘Campbell’s *Pleasures of Hope* has been strangely overrated: its fine words and sounding lines please the generality of readers, who never stop to ask themselves the meaning of a passage. The lines,

“Where Andes, giant of the western star,
With meteor-standard to the winds unfurl’d,
Looks from his throne of clouds o’er half the world,”

are sheer nonsense,—nothing more than a poetical indigestion. What has a giant to do with a star? What is a meteor-standard?—but it is useless to inquire what such stuff means. Once, at my house, Professor Wilson having spoken of those lines with great admiration, a very sensible and accomplished lady who happened to be present begged him to explain to her their meaning. He was extremely indignant; and, taking down the *Pleasures of Hope* from a shelf, read the lines aloud, and declared that they were splendid. ‘Well, sir,’ said the lady, ‘*but what do they mean?*’ Dashing the book on the floor, he exclaimed in his broad Scottish accent, ‘I’ll be daum’d if I can tell!’”

One simile in Mr. Rogers's *Epistle to a Friend* has puzzled many readers, we should think :

“Lo, here, attendant on the shadowy hour,
The closet-supper served by hands unseen,
Sheds, like an evening star, its ray serene
To hail our coming.”

Now turn a closet-supper how you will, it is very hard to make any thing like an evening star of it ; and what possible comestible can hail its approaching devourers with a ray serene ? Intensely rural as Mr. Rogers is, he would hardly set a dish of glowworms before his friend from town. But there is a note,—let us refer to that. Ah, our old friend the Latin quotation, who is a sort of Morrison's universal pill in literature, enabling us to digest any thing on which he can be brought to bear, however remotely :

“— aurea sunt juvenum simulacra per ædes,
 Lampadas igniferas manibus retinentia dextris.”

But who on earth could have supposed that a “closet-supper” meant the golden image of a youth with a candle in his hand ?

The poet says that at breakfast the *Times* “unfolds,” meaning that some one goes through the painful task of unfolding it. He speaks of vessels going “athwart” the ocean ; and uses “inly gliding” in the sense of gliding into, &c.

Such criticism is descending to minutiae ; but it is worth while in the present case, because perhaps no author ever spent more pains in heightening and perfecting his productions than Rogers, and he thus becomes the best instance of how impossible it is for mediocrity of intellect and imagination to ascend out of its natural sphere by grasping at the forms of expression which are natural to higher genius. You cannot supply the want of imagination by any, however dexterous, a disposition over a lay figure, of the garments in which the former

naturally clothes itself. Imagination has a strange trans-fusing power over language, it moulds it almost as the passions do the countenance; it compels it to *utterance*; while cold correctness, aiming at the result alone, falls into the very errors which it conceives itself most secure against.

Is there, then, no such thing as an art of expression? Certainly there is, and one which every man who wishes to write should study deeply. But there is no *art of writing* apart from *expression*. Young men are told to form themselves on the "style" of Addison, or Burnet, or Pope, or Chillingworth. Before following this advice, they would do well to consider whether they wish to say the same things. Let them rather examine how great men expressed what they had to express; let them study and feel how their words convey their thoughts. Let them master *language*; and then, when they have any thing to say, they will be able to say it with force and exactness, and the style will be their own. They must learn to utter themselves, not to handle the utterance of others.

Rogers's two best poems appear to us to be the *Human Life* and the *Italy*. True, the latter is little more than a poetical guide-book, and has no claim to be considered a substantive poem; but some of the fragments are not without beauty; they have a greater simplicity and directness than his other poems, bear less trace of effort, and recommend themselves by a certain airy elegance in their descriptions and narrations. The simplicity is that of art, not of nature; but there is an entire absence of affectation. Mr. Rogers is always commonplace; but he is rarely feeble, and never maudlin,—defects we are apt to associate with a high degree of refinement. And he is not weak; on the contrary, there is self-reliance, and a sort of stiff elasticity of nature shows itself. He has common, though very common sense, and writes verse as if he might be a good man of business.

The *Human Life* has many of the faults which belong to his early school. It is, moreover, a very incongruous whole. The life of man is described by tracing the career of an individual made up of Cincinnatus, Lord Russell, Epaminondas, and Mr. Fox; who is represented, now at his plough, now in the senate, now breakfasting comfortably under "fragrant clouds of mocha and sou-chong," with his newspaper and all modern appliances, now rushing out with helmet and sword on a sudden cry of "to arms!" and dyeing a neighbouring stream with blood. But some of the detached pictures of life are full of graceful drawing, and forbid us to deny Mr. Rogers the claims of affectionate and tender, though not deep or passionate feeling. And he has this high title to respect, that he is *genuine*, and never affects or strains after a deeper vein of sentiment than is natural to him. We have quoted him often for his defects, let us quote him once for his beauties:

"Nor many moons o'er hill and valley rise
 Ere to the gate with nymph-like step she flies,
 And their first-born holds forth, their darling boy,
 With smiles how sweet, how full of love and joy,
 To meet him coming; theirs through every year
 Pure transports, such as each to each endear!
 And laughing eyes and laughing voices fill
 Their home with gladness. She, when all are still,
 Comes and undraws the curtain as they lie,
 In sleep how beautiful! He, when the sky
 Gleams, and the wood sends up its harmony,
 When, gathering round his bed, they climb to share
 His kisses, and with gentle violence there
 Break in upon a dream not half so fair,
 Up to the hill-top leads their little feet;
 Or by the forest-lodge, perchance to meet
 The stag-herd on its march, perchance to hear
 The otter rustling in the sedgy mere;
 Or to the echo near the abbot's tree,
 That gave him back his words of pleasantry—
 When the house stood, no merrier man than he!
 And, as they wander with a keen delight,
 If but a leveret catch their quicker sight

Down a green alley, or a squirrel then
 Climb the gnarled oak, and look and climb again,—
 If but a moth flit by, an acorn fall,
 He turns their thoughts to Him who made them all ;
 These with unequal footsteps following fast,
 These clinging by his cloak, unwilling to be last."

That Rogers has a charm of his own no one can deny. Yet it is not easy to define it. You seem to have it on the surface of his poetry, and to lose it the moment you go deeper. It is the mark left by his peculiar power, which lay in a very uncommon refinement, perhaps a very rarely equalled refinement of taste and a keen exquisite sense of fitness : he had a wonderful control over all that belongs to words, except their meanings, and a marvellous art of arranging them so as to please both eye and ear, the former especially. Form is always uppermost with him, and the more so the more it is external ; the traces of his power are found more in his verse and his diction than in his subject or his thoughts ; and we have, as in his own Etruscan vases, wonderful grace and proportion of shape given to the commonest material. Utter poverty of thought is apparent in every page. A great poet pours wine into crystal vessels, Rogers occupies himself in staining them tastefully to hold toast-and-water. As we read him, we may stretch a point to say with Pope's father, "These be good verses ;" but never can we say, "This is good poetry."

THOMAS MOORE.*

[July 1856.]

It is the favourite notion of modern biographers that a man ought to be made to write his own life ; that a vivid and faithful image can only be obtained, and can be fully obtained, from the self-delineation, conscious or unconscious, of the man himself, in memoirs or letters. This is one of those ideas which carry so plausible a self-recommendation with them, that they are accepted without examination ; and it is not until they have been worked some time as undoubted truths, that, in the course of wear and tear, they begin to betray their alloy of error. The fact is, that though some degree of direct self-delineation may be necessary to supply any complete conception of a man, yet without accessory sources of information it can never be sufficient ; and for this there are several simple and sufficient reasons. A man won't tell us all about himself, nor can he if he would. Even a man like Rousseau, who makes it his special boast to let shameless day into the most secret recesses of his life and heart, yet keeps a shade for the devouring cankers of vanity and self-love, which eat deeper and more festering sores than even his morbid taste can bear to probe. We all have two opinions of ourselves : sane men look at the better one, and shake off the terror of the other ; and that occasional recurrence to it by which every now and then we balance our self-estimate is not a thing we can place at the disposal of those around us. Nor would we

* *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore.* Edited by the Right Honourable Lord John Russell, M.P. London : Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853-1856.

if we could. We can more easily bear to think ill of ourselves than to have others do so ; and the allusion by our friends to faults of which we stand self-convicted, yet hoped were hidden, strikes us as one of the most flagrant forms of scandal. Besides we do not know all about ourselves : more than any other we know ; but we are not only the being we appear to ourselves, we are also in some sense what we appear to others ; and though we should hardly be willing to exchange our self-knowledge for that of others, yet should

“ The Gods the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as others see us,”

it would certainly add, however unpleasantly, to the gross amount of our information. Hence, when we read the life of a remarkable man, we wish to know not only what he chooses to divulge of what he knows of himself, or what he unconsciously reveals in his writings ; we wish also to know what impression he produced on external observers. Moreover, if a biography is to be a work of art, we must have a biographer : the work must bear the stamp of a creating mind : the artist, as well as the subject of his art, must have a recognisable impress. Rembrandt looks out from the canvas on which he paints the portrait of some burgomaster, and it is the spirit of Claude that is infused through those serene Italian landscapes. Nothing but a daguerreotype *can* be a mere copy ; and what a daguerreotype is to a landscape, are diaries and letters to a biography,—an image true only of certain features, necessarily distorted in others, and not a work of art. But we like to have a work of art. We enjoy a pleasure from our sympathy with the creative spirit it displays, and we enjoy the reflected light thrown on the biographer. What would Johnson's life be without the naïve idolatry of Boswell ? It is the salt of the whole, and gives the point to half the anecdotes. Moore himself notes down a happy case in point : “ Boswell

mentions Johnson saying to him, one night when they were sleeping in the same room and conversing, 'If you don't stop talking, sir, I will get up and tie you to the bed-post.' I mention this (adds Boswell) to show the faculty he had of placing his adversary in a ridiculous position." What would the story be without the comment? What should we have learned of this same Samuel Johnson from his memoirs and correspondence? Fancy eight volumes of them. We should have had not a monument, but a sesquipedalian sarcophagus. Sometimes, indeed, the individuality of the historian is so prominent as to give the leading characteristic to his work, as when Carlyle uses history and biography as wax on which to stamp the image of his own mind, or Defoe ascribes his own marked traits of character alike to harlots, pirates, princes, quakers, and cavaliers. We are not urging that a biography is always better reading than a diary, only that it has a completeness the latter never can have. Even where a man writes his own life, as no doubt he may do,—re-creates himself as it were, casts his own idea of himself into form,—such an image, though probably more exact, minute, and life-like than any other, will still be partial. As a man can never see his whole image in a glass, so he can never form a complete reflection of himself in his own mind. The external biographer meanwhile can walk round him; though he can never get quite close, he can gather up a thousand clues from the observation of others; fragmentary, and often, no doubt, delusive, yet still carrying with them on the whole, to a man of discrimination and imaginative insight, sufficient indicia of their truth or falsehood. From these and from his own experience,—for the biographer does not occupy the most favourable position for the exercise of his art unless he has himself been intimate with his subject,—a man of genius may form a more complete, and on the whole a more truthful, image of another than any man can give of himself.

As to letters, usually so much relied on, they are of all things the most fallacious indications of character, whether they be the letters to a man or the letters from him. We don't write to a man to tell him what we think of him ; we would not for the world he should know ; we wish to be agreeable, especially to our best friends, who are the people with whose faults we are most familiar : on the other hand, when we write, it is not to betray ourselves ; and even in the very frankest and most intimate self-revelations of friendship and love, we unconsciously, and even necessarily distort the proportions and soften the edges of our characters. A sphere of isolation is granted to, nay forced upon, each one of us ; to be known strikes us as fearful, yet to be unknown carries with it sometimes a feeling of loneliness still more terrible, and a harassing sense of a want of genuineness in our relations to others. And hence it is one of the profoundest consolations and most enduring sustainments which Religion brings to the perplexed spirits of men, that it assures them of the presence of One by whom they are known even as they are, through every ravelled thread and fine-spun filament of their complicated existence ; makes them feel that they are embraced and comprehended ; and though an insoluble problem to themselves and others, are not without an explanation, a purpose, and a place.

Moreover, the degree in which a man's writings image himself varies infinitely. Some men know themselves, others don't ; some write themselves, others are of so chameleon-like a nature that they take a tinge of each person whom they address, and in writing to a man become for a moment like him ; their very handwriting will often bear traces from the letter they are answering. Different lives are not alike expressible ; some men live in thought, some in action, some in feeling. Different men express different sides of their character, often not the predominant one. A reserved man

of feeling tells you only what he is doing ; a thoughtful man of action (like Dr. Arnold, for instance) tells you of what he is thinking. Some men are not themselves when they write their letters : they become a correspondent. Do Pope's letters tell us any thing about him ? He was thinking of absolutely nothing in writing them but of what would make a well-turned epistle ; it is like reading deal-boards to peruse them.

Lord John Russell has not chosen to take the trouble of writing his friend's life. He has not even chosen to do common justice to the materials in his hands. Without the loss of a single trait of character, however minute, they might have been compressed into readable limits, and made into an interesting and entertaining book, instead of being flung in a mass before us, encumbered with a thousand characterless details and endless repetitions. Moore kept this diary as memoranda for memoirs he intended to write : he did not think the world would be called on to read it at large. He must be a very great man indeed of whom we wish to know where he dined seven days in the week. Much of this sort of thing would have been well exchanged for some fuller evidence from Lord John himself as to the habits and character of a man with whom he was intimate for so many years. The editor, however, has preferred a less laborious course. He supplies a short preface, insisting on one or two characteristics made sufficiently obvious in the voluminous pages of the diary, quotes from the biographies of Scott and Byron one or two tributes to his genius, and furnishes us at very disproportionate length with his own views about Tasso. Having done thus much, he launches us without further guide into a sea of letters and diaries, and concludes the work with a few pages of postscript, which add nothing to our knowledge of the man. From these, and from the various hints with which contemporary literature abounds, those of a generation too late to

have known him in his prime must form their idea of the life and character of Moore.

It is not a difficult character to estimate. It contains none of those strongly-marked contrasts which make Byron an enigma. It is the easier because it is always the same. Most men go through more or less of a process of development in their passage through life, and are different at different stages. Some slowly change, and you can mark the process; others move *per saltum*, and you see only the two contrasted pictures. Shakspeare's Harry Prince of Wales transformed to Henry the Fifth is no more untrue to nature than Crabbe's Edward Shore, veering in slow gradation from a man of genius to an idiot. Wellington, playing in Committee with his "quiz," and in whose "vacant face" Luttrell read that he at least would never succeed,—who can trace by what changes he became the writer of the Peninsular despatches? Moore, however, never seems to have altered. We see him on his first introduction to the stage, a little, round-faced, buoyant, clever, and pleasantly self-conceited child, with a wonderful faculty of making himself welcome, a healthy zest for enjoyment, and true and tender affections. Through life, till the seclusion of his last retreat shuts him from the world, he remains exactly the same, except that he grows larger and dresses differently.

It was at a grocer's shop in Dublin (on the 28th May 1779, according to his own account) that Tom Moore was born, and passed the first nineteen years of his life. His parents, though low in the social scale, were not vulgar. Of his father we hear little; but his letters are well-written sensible productions, and his son describes him as "one of Nature's gentlemen." He had, he tells us, a quiet searching humour, which he did not scruple to exercise on the priests of his own faith, to the mingled amusement and annoyance of his wife, who was a sincere and even superstitious Catholic. "I

vow to God, Jack Moore," she would say, "I am ashamed of you." From his mother Moore seems to have derived his gay, pleasure-loving disposition, his passion for music, and his taste for social enjoyments. It was she who made the two little drawing-rooms and the adjoining closet the scene of those crowded and delightful little supper-parties, in the midst of whose genial social festivities her son was brought up; here he learnt to associate jollity and "the bowl," not with mere hard drinking and roaring of choruses in male society, but with those more refined and intellectual enjoyments from which he never disconnected them. The presence of women, of wit, and of kindly fellowship, went always to his idea of a feast; and the association was no doubt founded in these experiences of his youth. Music was never wanting: Wesley Doyle and Joe Kelly sang their duets; his mother subscribed her share, singing in a 'soft, clear voice,' "How sweet in the woodlands;" and Master Tom was wont to give with no small *éclat* Dibdin's songs and the duet with Norah in the "Poor Soldier." He was a precocious boy,—“an old little crab,” as a rival Irish Cornelia once somewhat splenetically observed,—but precocious only in the liveliness and quickness of his parts; he did not anticipate manhood, it may almost be questioned whether he ever reached it. He wanted always something of the grave sense of responsibility which manhood generally brings. But though many men are children all their lives, Tom Moore was something much rarer—all his life a well-bred little boy. When quite a child, he could sing a song or recite a poem so as to give real pleasure to his hearers; and no embarrassing modesty on the part of himself or his friends prevented his talents being displayed to the best advantage. Even the triumphs and flatteries showered upon the national poet in the highest meridian of his fame read much like the account of his ovations as a schoolboy, when, on his Saturday returns from school,

there "generally came with my sister a number of young girls to meet me, and, full of smiles and welcome, walked by the side of my pony into the town!"

There is no binding element in Moore's existence. It is a rope of sand, made up of the petty engagements of the day. He has no objects in life but to provide for its continuance, and to enjoy it as it goes. There is no continuity in his mind either. He is never establishing any truths, making any permanent deductions from his experience. He always seems to begin the day just where he was yesterday; his mind is the same at five-and-twenty and at sixty. He never seems, even in his literary labours, to feel the least real interest in his subject. He is absorbed in thinking how he shall do it so as to get the most praise and money. It is the very spirit of the schoolboy, who gets up his Tacitus and Sophocles for the sake of a high place in his class, and has no idea that they deserve to be studied for their own sake. His diary is only worth reading all through to give you a thorough idea of the self-occupation, the restlessness, and the incessant pursuit of small excitements, which distinguish the writer; and to say that it is worth perusing on this account, is to presuppose that you are willing to make some effort to gain a vivid idea of Tom Moore's frivolity. Its pages are filled throughout with the same eternal round of personal engagements, lists of people he saw or dined with, little disconnected scraps of conversation; containing some bit of information that struck him, or some oddity that made him laugh—many of them curious and amusing enough. But there is no colour in the thing; he never reproduces the people and the scenes among which he is living. The least interesting and most wearisome reading of all forms of narrative is that which is at once minute and naked, which tells you every incident without any of that fullness of surrounding circumstance which alone can give it life. This style a diary almost necessarily

assumes; the fact of the day, that you walked in the fields, that Lord Lansdowne called, or that you had cutlets for dinner, seems at the time (at least it did so to Moore) sufficiently important to be noted in your diary: it is not, however, important enough to dwell upon, and a habit is contracted of noting every thing down in a brief skeleton form, especially as writing a diary soon becomes a bore, and as the times when you are really engaged in matters of importance are just those when you have least leisure to give an account of them. The diary of a man of thought, who uses it as a memorandum-book of what passes in his mind, or the diary of a man in important action, which forms a framework that may be filled up from other sources, and gives clues in various directions to the actions of others,—these may be valuable; but the diary of a literary man who doesn't think, can rarely be worth keeping, and that of a diner-out still less so. Not but that each of them may have valuable experiences to record; but that day after day can scarcely demand an historical record of its own. Let such men write their own memoirs, by all means; but we implore them not to keep diaries. Somebody will insist on publishing them whole, and a discontented generation will have to read them. Gray kept a daily record of the weather. We wonder it has never been published as a contribution to his life.

The incessant allusions in Moore's diary to the effect of his works and of his singing, the anxious collection of every little tribute to his success,—have been said to be evidence, not so much of vanity as of a humility which required these supports. They spring really from the fact that what he did had no value of its own to him. He measured every thing simply by its power of commanding this sort of applause. He was not one of those men who, having work to do, do it, and pass their own judgment on what they have done; who use the opinions of others only as correctives of their own; who

smile when they are unjustly condemned, and feel uneasy when they are unjustly praised. Moore lived on the favouring breath of his readers. A credit at Longmans' and the applause of the coteries were the alpha and omega of his literary ambition. But though he had little or none of the artist's love of his work, or pride in it for its own sake, his temper as a man required that the sort of applause he courted should be such as the world esteemed best worth having, and that the pay should come from quarters that ranked highest in social standing. In his later years, while occupied with the uncongenial and burdensome *History of Ireland*, on which he exhausted the energies of his last working days, we find him refusing offers of employment much better adapted to the natural rank and order of his genius, but which he declined as derogatory to his social and literary standing. He was offered 500*l.*—700*l.* a year to edit the *Keepsake*—1000*l.* a year to write it all, 100*l.* for a hundred lines, 600*l.* for 120 pages. No, he would none of it. "The fact is," he says, "it is my *name* brings these offers; and my name would suffer by accepting them." It was with difficulty he was induced to accept (and he limited his acceptance to one year) Captain Marryat's munificent offer of 500*l.* a year for contributions to the *Metropolitan* just so often as it might suit him to give them, stipulating only for something in each of the three next numbers. Though writing was purely a profession to him, he never at any time grasped at gain, or balanced between large profits and a high and unblemished reputation. He had always, moreover, a pleasure in executing his work well, and a very conscientious anxiety to justify confidence reposed in his powers.

Moore's genius and his heart stand in remarkable contrast. The one, with all its brilliancy, tact, and effectiveness, is in truth superficial in its character, and strikes no deep root; while the restlessness of his tem-

perament, his sensitiveness to passing emotions, his airy gaiety and cheerful spirits, are based on real depth of affectionateness and fidelity: and hence it came that while he supported adverse fortune and struggled through limited means with unfailing courage and cheerfulness, the gradual loss by death of all who were most dear to him,—except his wife, of every relative that he had in the world,—shattered his health and overwhelmed his spirits.

His *Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion*, a book which ought to give us some insight into the character of Moore's faith, is written more under an Irish inspiration than a Catholic one. It is a defence of the Catholic religion, hedging the controversy between it and Protestantism within very narrow limits, and conducting it within these limits on a very narrow basis. There are two ways of arguing all questions: one is, to attempt to grasp in its fullness the real case of your adversary, to pierce to the real ground on which he supports his convictions, to find the elements of truth which are embraced in it, and to follow the edge of that delicate boundary along which it melts into error,—this is the mode which a powerful mind, with strong convictions of its own, and a desire to convince minds of another class, will naturally pursue. The other course is, to direct exclusive attention to what seem the weakest points of an adversary's case; to batter away at these; to strip away the finer suggestions of words, and insist on holding them to their naked grammatical meaning, uninfluenced by the tone of the connection and the character of the writer's mind; to snatch at small advantages; to appeal to the prejudices of your own party instead of the candour of the other; in short, to harass the suburbs, instead of compelling a surrender by parallels and regular approaches. The *Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion* is an instance of the latter mode of argument. It is a laborious array of what the writer thinks the weak

points of Protestantism, among which the facts that Luther drank beer and thought he saw the devil hold a prominent place. It is an array of citations to show that the early Fathers believed in the Real Presence; an attempt to impugn the principle of private judgment by enumerating the various sects into which Protestantism has branched, and by setting up the results of German investigation as a bugbear to frighten us from an open perusal of the Bible. It is curious how easily Moore adapts himself to the close air of the Catholic Church. The book is weak, nay, often destructive to the cause he advocates; for he uses the argument of the moment without any regard to its ultimate tendencies. Dr. Doyle perceived this when he said, in praising the book, that "if St. Augustine were made less heretical, and Scratchenback (the German professor) less plausible, the work is one of which any of us might be proud." It is not always safe to prove your proposition by a *reductio ad theologiam Germanicam*. Moore was annoyed that he should be identified with his hero; while at the same time he says he does firmly believe all that he has said in his book of the superiority of the Roman Catholic religion over the Protestant in point of antiquity, authority, and consistency. That is, he thought the early Fathers more Catholic than Protestant. Perhaps he perceived that this point might be granted without any very fatal consequences to the common principles of Protestant churches. He was not in his book arguing out his own convictions; he was only striking a blow, with an Irishman's natural irritation, at the Established Church in Ireland. Whatever faith he thought himself bound to profess and defend, his real conclusions as to the relative advantages of the two churches are evident enough from several expressions he lets fall. We may cite, in particular, one memorandum which occurs in his diary of a conversation with his sister after their father's death:

"Our conversation naturally turned upon religion ; and my sister Kate, who, the last time I saw her, was more than half-inclined to declare herself a Protestant, told me she had since taken my advice and remained quietly a Catholic. . . . For myself, my having married a Protestant wife gave me an opportunity of choosing a religion, at least for my children ; and if my marriage had no other advantage, I should think *this* quite sufficient to be grateful for."

His motive for continuing a professed member of one religion with this strong view of the real superiority of another, was probably in great measure because he felt the Irish cause to be bound up so intimately with Catholicism, that a renunciation of the latter would be damaging to the interests of the former, and would be felt as a desertion by his countrymen.

Moore wittily said that some men discount their reputation, and spend it all in their lifetime. It was eminently his own case. His popularity as a poet was a corollary from his skill in adapting words and music to one another, and from his great success in society. The difficulty is to get people to read poetry at all ; once get them to read with a preconception of the excellence of what they are engaged upon, and it is astonishing how easy it is to excite enthusiasm, and how perseveringly readers will drain the very dregs of a popular author. The fact is, there is as much excellence in average poetry as average readers are capable of appreciating ; and it needs the fining-off process of two or three generations before the convictions of competent judges begin to tell. There are people with strong convictions about Moore ; but they are not numerous. Lord John is one. He thinks the poets of the early part of this century are—first, Byron ; second, Scott ; third, Moore. One doesn't contradict an assertion of this sort. One smiles at it. It is a harmless and limited Whig tradition. It is a belief preserved from the days when these men were living, and when a man might

have held such an opinion without any serious impugnement of his judgment or taste. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley—even Crabbe—were introducing features so new into the poetry of their time, that it was no wonder they were slow to gain admirers. They were raising poetic insight to its long-lost place at the head of all the varied endowments that must meet in the poet. But in those high social circles in which Moore and Rogers moved, and which represented, not indeed the genius, but the most polished tastes and cultivated understandings in the nation, quite a different test of excellence prevailed. Masterly execution was there accounted the highest merit. The chief pleasure they derived from poetry was in contemplating the skill of the artist in selection and arrangement of language, and in giving at once smoothness and diversity to his rhythm. Byron, in his headstrong way, boldly maintains that execution is the sole test of a poet. Lord Holland thought hours were well spent in putting a polish on an epigram. Rogers esteemed Crabbe's "Library" higher than his "Tales." The men who held these opinions were not insensible to the higher beauties of poetry; but it was to finish and ornament they devoted their conscious attention. Moore pleased these higher critics among whom he lived by the polish and point of his verses. He pleased the multitude, and he pleases many still (and not altogether without reason), by the brightness of his imagery and the richness of his ornamentation. He belongs to the decorative school. His imagery is bright; but it has none of that freshness and force which distinguish the poet who interprets to others through the living aspects of nature which have been interpreters to him. Moore is always in an artificial world of poesy distinct from the real ever new world in which we live. He systematically and avowedly preferred to get his poetical materials at second hand. He uses the things which he finds other men have used; he

polishes them and dresses them up with infinite skill ; he turns them, refaces them, divides them, and recombines them with a fancy whose resources seem inexhaustible.

The most obvious characteristic of his poetry is its superficiality. This accounts both for its sudden popularity and its rapid neglect. Its surface is highly attractive ; but it yields all its charms to the first glance. The more you read it, the less you like it. When the poet is greater than his reader ; when the depth or the subtlety of his thought can scarcely find expression in words, and yet the expression he seizes does in some way convey the thought there,—then to a casual perusal the words often yield nothing ; one man comes and “can’t see any thing in it ;” but another reads and reads again and again, and finds it an inexhaustible mine of beauty and interest ; and the very labour and attention, the excitement of his whole poetic nature, that has been required to pierce to the full meaning, is in itself a high enjoyment. We raise our eyes to the bright sky above us, it is darkness spangled with lamps ; we gaze, and they recede, they shine from unfathomable depths of blue ether ; still we gaze, and divine a holy serenity in their calm fires ; and at length, to patient yearning eyes, they seem to yield the depths of their meaning, and walk their silent courses, a revelation of the eternal harmonies of the universe. We go to Vauxhall, we see long lines of fire ; globes, stars, pyramids of fire—azure, ruby, emerald, and white. We are struck with the beauty and dazzling brightness of the scene. We look, we begin to see how it is made up ; there is a nakedness about it. We approach the ruby—we find it is a little red lamp with a light in it ; we turn to the azure—it is a little blue lamp with a light in it ; they are hung on nails on a wooden scaffolding. We smell oil—we regret we have approached so near—we go back to our old place—we gaze at it again—we say, “Yes, it is very beautiful, no doubt,”—we go, and don’t visit Vaux-

hall again. So it is with the decorative school of poetry. It needs but one perusal to give us all the pleasure we are capable of gathering from the sweet modulations, the rich and varied fancies, the nicely responding similes, the choicely culled sensual images and obvious sentiment of Moore: give a more sustained attention, look close for any depth of meaning, and you discover the barrenness of it all. There was no depth of soil in his nature capable of yielding the fruits of true poetry. He had neither fullness nor passionateness of nature, nor had he the imagination which perhaps can replace them. He was a delightful companion, a devoted son, a tender husband; he had a genial temper and a kindly nature; but he was small. "I look upon *Mooerr*," said Leigh Hunt's Spanish friend, "as an active little man." He *was* an active little man, a "little quiver fellow," as Justice Shallow says,—ready-witted, gay, indefatigable, with sharply-edged distinct ideas, and confidence in himself; he was manly in the sense of being high-spirited, but he wanted something of the breadth of manhood. He always bore the marks of his training—first as a home boy, and then as a singing-bird in London parties. He wanted an out-of-door mind; he wanted the education which a man gets by mingling with boys in athletic sports, and with men in the struggle of a profession. He is a carpet poet.

He complains himself that his boudoir education had stunted his growth. Perhaps it did; but Nature had fitted him for the dining-room and drawing-room, not for the woods and fields; she meant him to find his poetry in D'Herbelot, not in the living pages of nature; in the library at Bowood, not in the human hearts with which he was surrounded. Those social hours which he embellished were the relaxations of the men with whom he lived; but they were his life. Writing was his business; but visiting was his occupation. For a great poet he was never formed. He was

formed to do what he did well—to feel and to interpret music. He has himself left it on record, that his poetry originated in his desire to give an expression through a more articulate medium to the emotions and passions that music appeared to him to express. His was precisely the nature formed to feel the full charm of music; not perhaps to enter into its full beauties as an art, but to experience its full power over the emotions. He had precisely the delicate organisation which gives that refined zest to the pleasures of sense, and that nicety of discrimination in sensuous impressions, which are necessary to the gourmand, and necessary, but not sufficient, to enable a man to feel the full effects of music; but Moore also possessed, and in the highest degree, what more is wanted for the latter purpose. He had a mobility, a naked susceptibility in the emotional part of his nature, vibrating with every change of those impressions which his physical conformation made him so apt to receive. Hence his insight into the meaning of music; hence, too, his power of rendering its full meaning when himself playing and singing. He was not a great musician, nor was his voice remarkable for its power or compass, though eminently so for softness. It was the fineness and clearness of his articulation, and his faculty of breathing forth the whole soul of the music—it was his own sensibility, that gave him so wonderful a power over the sensibilities of his hearers:

“ ’Twas not the air, ’twas not the words,
But that deep magic in the chords,
And in the lips, that gave such power
As music knew not till that hour.”

It was this that drew tears from all the women round him, and which sometimes so overpowered himself, that he burst into violent fits of weeping, and had to retire sobbing loudly from the room.

Only a genius with equal insight into the meanings of music can pronounce whether he has truly inter-

preted the significance of the national airs with which his name is connected. Probably he felt their meaning better than he could reproduce it; still the common consent of men finds no flaw in his evocations of the hidden spirit, and no man was perhaps ever found so skilful in adapting language and rhythm to the music which was to accompany it, and of which it was to be the emotional exponent. There is no instance, as far as we are aware, in which he composed music to a given song. He inverted always the true position of the arts, making the higher subservient to the lower. "I can answer for their sound," he says, speaking of his songs, "with somewhat more confidence than for their sense." Hence it is hardly fair to read them, at least unless you remember the air. They lose, as he himself says, their *animæ dimidium* when dissociated from music. They are not what we usually call songs in English; brief lyrical poems, capable from their form and shortness of being set to music; short free utterances from the poet, embodying sometimes his very highest inspirations, as in the case of Ben Jonson and Goethe;—no, they are made to fit the music, just as some poets write verses to given illustrations. They may still be poems; it is to write a poem to extract and render the heart of music; but it can never be so high an exercise of art as when the poet has the full range of nature; and it is scarcely poetry at all when a man only racks his fancy for something which will go to the tune. The natural subordination of Moore's poetical genius to his musical one fitly adapted him for this sort of song-writing. He had no strong creative impulse urging him to make a form of his own instead of moving within forms ready made, no powerful imagination haunting him with ideal visions he must endow with the life of art; he could and did manufacture verse in a patient, steady, and skilful manner, and in his own special walk with unparalleled success, for he had in his hands the tools of

all others the most necessary to such a workman—a brilliant and fertile fancy, a happy vein of wit, feeling not too deep to be readily made use of, and a fluent supply of words. A rich vocabulary, a full command over the resources of the English language, he had not; but he did not require it. He goes to work exactly like a jeweller, and uses the same kind of ornaments. He sends his publisher a correction, which he says will make the song “sparkle” more; he says he has robbed a prologue of its only “trinkets” to make up one of the Irish melodies; he leaves gaps to be filled up with “epithets” at his leisure;—every thing tends to show the unimpassioned methodical way in which he turned out his poetry. He says, “I have never doubted that poetry is a far more matter-of-fact thing than your people who are only matter-of-fact can understand or allow.”

Still, some of his songs embody and express real feeling—these are chiefly the patriotic ones in the earlier numbers of the *Irish Melodies*; and often without touching us deeply he gives a sweet and airy expression to our enjoyments, our hopes, and our regrets. The great mass of his songs, however, it is not possible to read as poetry. Their number is amazing, and their variety wonderful, as far as it is in the power of fancy to afford variety; but mere fancy is so predominant over both thought and feeling, that this alone gives to them all an essential sameness. His songs follow one another like the waves on a flat shore—with an endless variety of curving lines of foam, but with an unchanging uniformity in the whole advance of the tide; the sun sparkles with a restless glitter over the ever new dancing wavelets and furrows of the sea; but the whole aspect of the scene remains the same.

In his love-poetry this is especially the case. We have none of the more profound or complex manifestations of the passion; he never attempts more than to hang the garland of his fancy over the most threadbare con-

ventionalities of the subject. And it is for the most part a disagreeable class of conventionalities; it is always the same story; exhilaration at the approach of a thing with rosy lips, depression at the absence of a thing with rosy lips, remonstrances with things with beaming eyes, superiority of love to reason—*et hoc genus omne*. Contrast these decorated platitudes of Moore's with Burns's personal, direct, vigorous, passion-breathing songs. Rude as the latter sometimes are, they have a moving power and a genuine delicacy, because they come from the heart. But Moore lights the fire of his fancy at the senses. Burns was a peasant, and he wrote in the free and simple language of passion common to all stations, but ungraced with those higher charms which refinement and cultivation in the object of attachment naturally give to the expression of the feelings. But Moore spent all his life among the most highly bred women of England, and he writes as if he had lived in the times of Catullus and Horace—we don't mean with their grossness, but with the same trifling spirit and sensual inspirations. Nothing can well be more offensive than the whole tone of his poetry as regards the other sex. The little man struts about among his "girls" and his "Julias" and "Fannys" like a small Mahometan bantam cock. He treats the whole race of women like a set of dolls, vivified only for the sake of the pleasure he can derive from them. He never mentions them as if they had any existence on their own account. Most insufferable is he when he speaks of purity and innocence, as if they possessed it only in order to give them a greater charm for their lovers; when he says of the pleasures of indiscriminate attachments,

" 'Tis sweet, when all
 Their witcheries pall,
 To have a pure love to fly to ;"

or when he infers that the advantage of having "woman,

like something that's holy, watched over, and fenced from her childhood with purity round," is that she may come, "body and soul, fresh as spring to a lover!" Another very unpleasant style of his, though less common, is that which we find in such poems as *Love and the Novice*, where piety, gaiety, and love, are made up into a hotchpot.

The world has been apt to think him a libertine on the strength of Little's Poems; but bad as they are—and such things are about the most mischievous things a man can write—still they must not be exactly considered as evidences of his way of life. He was always an amateur rake rather than a real one. Love, in his descriptive and poetic expression of it, is always, with one or two not very successful dramatic exceptions, a mingling of sensuous fancy and affection, warm and tender, not deep and fervent; a sparkling flame, not the red heat of an engrossing passion; the refinement of which his admirers speak is the refinement of a delicate organisation, never that of a pure spirit. His friend Atkinson's vindication of him, as handed down by Leigh Hunt, sounds ludicrous as applied to a little man past forty, but undoubtedly presents him in a point of view that has a great deal of truth in it. "Sir, they may talk of Moore as they please; but I tell you that I always consider him—I always consider my friend Thomas Moore,—as an infant sporting on the bosom of Venus."

The business-like way in which Moore wrote his verses is quite in keeping with his nature. Never was there a poet who was less of a dreamer; and under all his genial *abandon* was hidden a cool hard-headedness and a sharp insight into the true bearings of all worldly relations. His was the singular union of delicate and impressible senses; an almost quivering sensibility of the emotional nature, and a quick susceptibility to the more obvious forms of beauty, with a sceptical intellect,

a special taste for facts, a cool discriminating tact, much *savoir faire*, and an absence of all enthusiasm except the temporary one of a half-sensuous excitement. His were the external adornments of a poet enfolded in a man of the world. He would have compared himself to some hard-grained prosaic West-Indian tree (and he would have known the name of it), overhung by the gay luxuriant trailers and brilliant parasitic flowers of the tropics. This union, which is the true key to his genius, gives its character to all his poetry.

He is remarkable, moreover, for the passivity of his nature. He had none of that originating, anticipating mind which some men have,—no power of motion within himself; he was the creature of sensuous impressions; he was set in activity by external excitements. Observe his attitude towards Nature. To some men the external world, the beauty of Nature, the diversities of character, the joys of affection, come like the realisation of some preconceived idea, the outward clothing of a previous internal revelation; they have a moving principle within them ever on the search for that outward grace of form, or that living fulfilment of experience, which shall give body to their haunting desires. When affection comes, they say, "This is what I longed for;" when terrors overwhelm them, they say, "What I trembled at has arrived." In the face of Nature, clothed in some new aspect of beauty, they see a prevision fulfilled; the purple hills come to them as interpreters; the fleeting stars and wind-driven clouds are things by which they are enabled to speak what burns within them. Like the formless waters, the restless longings flow to and fro, till some breath of external beauty moves over them, and a new creation rises out of the waves. In other men the sight of Nature awakens the imagination which before slept; it stirs up new emotions: their thought is not, "Through this I can give a voice to what I have felt;" but "How much I desire to express

what now I feel!" Moore was of all men the merest recipient of external influences; and he is a curious instance of how little a man can receive through the senses alone without the aid of a prepared imagination. He never felt the *finer* influences of things; none but the very commonest and most universally accepted manifestations of beauty revealed themselves to him. His eye was clouded. The ordinary aspects of natural scenery had little attraction for him; but the novelty and magnificence of the great sights to which he was introduced in his travels in Switzerland produced a strong, though passing effect on his impressible nature. You see men of this sort: they are like a jelly; they tremble all over at what would little move most people, and yet receive no permanent impressions. It is only when the scene is before him, or yet perfectly fresh in his memory, that he can do it justice; and his prose descriptions of the moment are infinitely superior to his poetical reproductions. For the latter he preferred, he candidly tells us, to rely on the impressions of others. He always *read* up for his poetry; but his brief prose memoranda, written while the excitement is yet fresh, are remarkable for the vividness with which they convey the character of the scene and the emotions it was calculated to stir. On one occasion, returning from a visit to Ferney, he

"Saw Mont Blanc, with its attendant mountains, in the fullest glory, the rosy light shed on them by the setting sun, and their peaks rising so brightly behind the dark rocks in front, as if they belonged to some better world, or as if Astræa was just then leaving the glory of her last footsteps on their summits: nothing was ever so grand and beautiful."

Again:

"27th. Arrived at Brieg, at the foot of the Simplon; an oriental-looking little place, with its spires and towers. Ascended the Simplon, which baffles all description. A road, carried up into the very clouds, over torrents and precipices; nothing was ever like it. At the last stage, before we reached the barrier on the summit, walked on by myself, and saw such a scene by sunset as I shall never forget. That mighty pa-

norama of the Alps, whose summits there, indistinctly seen, looked like the top of gigantic waves, following close upon each other; the soft lights falling on those green spots which cultivation has conjured up in the midst of this wild scene; the pointed top of the Jungfrau, whose snows were then pink with the setting sun;—all was magnificent to a degree that quite overpowered me, and I alternately shuddered and shed tears as I looked upon it. Just, too, as we arrived near the snows on the very summit the moon rose beautifully over them, and gave a new sort of glory to the scene.”

The want of imagination is betrayed in his poetry by every defect which its absence necessitates. This faculty, as distinguished from the fancy, has been much discussed: but it has eluded its investigators; it is still a strange occult power, whose limits and whose operation remain unfathomed. It is not our purpose to add to the number of unrequited metaphysical anatomists. Suffice it that some men have a grasp of things unseen which others have not, and that in proportion to the degree in which they have it, is their power of vividly impressing upon others the subjects of their own imaginative conception. Now Moore has none of this power. His poetry is composed of a fleeting *succession* of images, ideas, and sentiments; each is not accessory to every other, so as to build up one conception, but each as it comes tends rather to obliterate and occupy the place of what went before, like the fleeting shadows of a magic-lantern. In his similes he is apt to make a transition from the thing to the illustration, and give the latter an utterly disproportioned degree of prominence and detail; he is apt, too, to make it illustrate not the essence but the accident of the matter in hand. His poetry wants the binding force of imagination; it is divergent; it coruscates, it does not shine. He touches on great thoughts and deep feelings, but in a way that shows they come from the surface of his mind, not from the depths of his nature.

A great poet, dealing with a remote time, and making

it the subject of his art, seizes on its essential character, grasps the distinctive wholes of individual life in which it was embodied; and his imagination once thoroughly possessed with these, lets his mind run free as to the mass of petty externals, the accidents of his subject. He can trust his genius that they will all be instinctively kept true to the dominant image in the imagination; and that is all he can do. That is his idea of the time; if that is true, the accessories are true to that; if that is untrue, there is no use in the accessories being correct. Nay, it is an injury; for in the one case we have, if no true picture of former times, yet a work of art consistent with itself; and in the other we have a picture partly true and partly false, and a hampered and inharmonious work of art. From such an imagination did Shakspeare paint the times of Coriolanus, of Julius Cæsar, of Antony, and of Troilus. Moore begins in exactly the reverse way.

Let us examine how *Lalla Rookh* came to be written. He was not struck with any event or character in Eastern history, which he felt impelled to make the subject of a fiction. It occurred to him that the East was a new field, and that Eastern poetry would tell in the market. Does he, then, search Eastern history for a fitting theme? No, he falls to reading most industriously; but it is not to acquaint himself with the forms of Eastern character and the spirit of Eastern life, but, as he himself tells us, "to form a storehouse, as it were, of illustration purely oriental, and so familiarise myself with its various treasures, that, as quick as fancy required the aid of fact in her spiritings, the memory was ready, like another Ariel, at her strong bidding to furnish materials for the spell-work. Such was for a long while the sole object of my studies." And further on he says, "It was in a slow and laborious collection of small facts that the first foundations of this fanciful romance were laid." Having got his materials,

he found great difficulty in working them up. "I have still by me the beginnings of several stories, continued some of them to the length of three or four hundred lines, which, after in vain endeavouring to mould them into shape, I threw aside. At last, fortunately as it proved, the thought occurred to me of founding a story on the fierce struggles so long maintained between the Ghebers, or ancient fire-worshippers of Persia, and their haughty Moslem masters. The cause of tolerance was again my inspiring theme, and the spirit that had spoken in the melodies of Ireland soon found itself at home in the East." As soon as he had got an Irish centre for an Eastern story, it was all plain sailing. Some minds can find a sufficient pleasure in the accuracy and appropriateness of details—they admire the beauty and correctness of the *mise-en-scène*; to others, if the play be poor in itself, the characters shadowy and unreal, and the actors untrue to life, then the scene-painting, the decorations, the "dresses of the period," the correct form of a *fibula*, or Macbeth in the right tartan, all go for nothing. Such a thing as a descriptive poem there may be, no doubt: the very thing a poet may have imagined, and which he limits himself to reproduce, may be the costume of a past society, or the scenery of a distant land, and he may enliven his poem with subordinate human interest; but such poetry is not of a very high class, nor very interesting to readers. The fault of *Lalla Rookh* is, that the poet, intending his main interest to lie in human character and incident, yet leaves these vague and colourless: they are such mere generalities—as in the *Fire-worshippers*, the fierce persecuting father, the lovely daughter, and the gallant patriot chief—that you cannot say whether they are true to the times or not, Persian or Irish; while the indistinctness of the picture is sought to be made up for by setting it in a most accurate and ornate Eastern frame. It may be said that, however subordinate, the

details ought to be correct. But there is a limit to this too; it must depend on how far the poet and his readers are familiar with those details. A poet employs the fancy as the interpreter of the imagination, and for the vehicles of expression he uses those things which by habit and connection best do express his thought to his own and other minds; his similes and metaphors are not cut-and-dried comparisons derived from the natural objects and the historical associations which would be most familiar in the times or places with which he is dealing, but those which have most power to excite the imagination and vivify the discernment of modern minds. To convey poetry to us, the words and imagery used must have been part of our everyday lives—words with all the richness of their complicated associations, and things with whose every various aspect we are familiar. It is not very easy to deviate widely from the language in which you profess to write; but Moore's poetry is crowded with imagery derived from things and facts of which we know nothing, and a simile does its work very ineffectually when you have to read a prose note to understand its meaning.

The research he expended on *The Epicurean* is something wonderful; and there is no doubt that all the particulars of his description are strictly in accordance with what somebody else has said some time ago: the longer ago the better. This does not mean that he has seized the spirit of the time, or reproduced the life and thought of Christian and Heathen Egypt in the second century; only that he rummaged an immense number of books to pick up any thing he could find to serve as materials for his fancy to work upon. The only thing he really wished to be correct in was external scenery and costume; as for the rest, there is nothing in Alciphron to prevent his being a sentimental modern man of fashion. Alethe would have found her place at least as well in a Puseyite convent as in the Pyramids;

and the two had fled with as much propriety to Scotland as up the Nile. The story hangs on the slightest possible thread of incident; the *dramatis personæ* have no life-likeness or substantive character about them; but the whole owes its charm to the gorgeous tints spread over the externals; the fancy is perpetually employed in reconstructing for us scenes of splendour and startling novelty. The broad Nile glitters in the sun, starred with the green islands; boats flit here and there, the stately temples are laid open, lamps shine, music echoes in our ears, dancing forms, lovely faces bewilder our eyes; we think we are at the opera-house, and the *ballet* is divine. Never was a *spectacle* got up with more skill or with a more lavish expenditure of materials. Alethe and Alciphron in a *pas-de-deux*, emblematic of the power of love and the Christian religion, display a grace and tenderness that move the hearts of all spectators. There is enjoyment of a certain sort in reading of this kind, something like that we have in seeing good fireworks; but as inferior to the pleasure real poetry gives as fireworks are

“To sight of vernal bloom, or summer’s rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine.”

In our first youth, indeed, when the imagination is awakening, and the intellect and the feelings at once keenly alive and undisciplined and uninformed by realities, this sort of stimulant to the fancy seems delightful; we devour it with absorbing interest, the artificiality does not spoil the sentiment, we don’t see the poverty that all this glitter enwraps. At that age we don’t care about our heroes and heroines being true to the complex realities of human beings; enough for us if the women are incarnations of loveliness, and the men paragons in courage and intellect. Moore’s is the *vin mousseux* of poetry; adolescents and some women drink it with pleasure; men prefer something with more body and real flavour.

His witty verses do not require any very minute examination. He has a keen sense of the ridiculous, and a happy knack of expression ; his poems are made up of a series of epigrammatic points, very felicitously turned, but revolving too much on the double meanings of words and phrases. He has humour, but he doesn't give it free play ; he compresses it into the forms of wit, where it moves hampered, like the jovial Bob Fudge in his French stays. Sometimes both idea and expression are genuinely humorous ; as where he makes the bishops say, when reminded of the self-denying habits of their early predecessors,

“We think it pious, but absurd ;”

and where, in one of his letters, he complains that “nothing goes right in this world, except for those with whom every thing, *please God*, will go wrong in the other.” This almost rivals a saying he tells of Charles Lamb's, when an elderly lady, after boring him with all the good qualities of some friend of hers, ended with, “I know him, bless him !” “Well, I don't,” said Lamb ; “but damn him at a hazard !”

For his social qualities we are mainly dependent on the evidence of others : but they must have been great to secure him the advantages they did. Besides his peculiar gift in singing, he had a *bonhomie*, a vivacity, a readiness and brilliancy of wit, and an easy familiarity with social forms, which the world found irresistible ; and which took an additional attraction for English circles from their association with that sort of warmth which an Irishman or a Frenchman throws into his demeanour during the most casual intercourse, and which only seems insincere to an Englishman, because to him it is not natural unless his feelings are more deeply and permanently engaged. He was quite at home in the polished and aristocratic sphere in which he moved, and never seems to have made any false com-

pliances to gain or keep his position there. He judged things, no doubt, somewhat too much by a worldly test ; and in his mode of speaking of some of his fellow poets, men of infinitely higher genius than himself, there is some trace of an air as if he had mistaken his social for real superiority. He speaks of the difficulty of not appearing fine in "such society" as he met at Christopher North's house in Edinburgh. He makes the most of any weak point in Wordsworth. He is a little superciliously surprised that Lamb only got 170*l.* for his *Essays of Elia* ; "should have thought it more," he says. He estimated that he himself had made at least 20,000*l.* by his writings. Still, on the whole, he carried his singular fortunes without undue elation, and, though not a man who went out of his own way to interest himself in the history or welfare of others, was a kindly and well-meaning member of the brotherhood. His poetry, great as are its real shortcomings and defects when compared with the reputation it once enjoyed, has this merit, that it is original ; and independently of its connection with music, it will always retain a place in the history of English literature, for it has been widely read, and has a distinctive character of its own. But its cloying assemblage of all that is most captivating to the senses, and to those emotions which lie nearest to them, can never have more than a passing interest for mature and cultivated minds. The mere jingle of words without sense will please children ; glitter of fancy, vague declamation, and abstract passion, are sufficient for the next stage of development ; but as the mind advances, it asks for harmony throughout all the form and essence of a poem, and in the poet for an insight wide and deep into the concrete forms of existence, above all, into those highest ones of individual life and character.

THE THEORY OF POETIC EXPRESSION :

GRAY.*

[August 1854.]

OF Gray's serious poems, the Elegy alone was received with general applause during his lifetime, and alone will secure his reputation. It was published by Dodsley in 1751, and before very long passed through eleven editions. Few poems have enjoyed such universal and constant attention. It is popular because the sentiments and ideas are level to universal comprehension, and it is full of tender feeling, expressed with exquisite finish of diction and harmony of verse, and with greater simplicity of language than is to be found in his other poems: for Gray often loses by the over-anxious care he bestowed on the verbal clothing of his conceptions.

In the highest mode of poetical imagination, the language and the idea are united like body and spirit, and the poet would find it hard to say which suggested the other; the whole springs complete from the forming mind, and is incapable of correction; in a second and lower mode, the mind is occupied by some vivid conception, or haunted by some image of beauty: it yearns to express it, to give it outward form and utterance—it ponders over the capacities of language, and revolves all its subtle analogies to find the true outward vestiture, which shall body forth in words to itself and

* The following formed part of a criticism in the *Prospective Review* for August 1854, on the Correspondence of Gray and Mason, edited by the Rev. John Mitford.

others the very thing which thus possesses the imagination. Mason's poetical power (such as it was) worked in this manner. He *had* creative impulse—ideas and fancies did visit him and call for expression. But they were neither of a high order nor took a firm hold upon him. He possessed neither patience nor a conscientious artistic feeling. He had few fine conceptions to be true to, and cared little to be true to such as he had. His habits of poetical composition betray his indolence and indifference to a high standard. His thoughts, as those of any man will do with a little practice, readily flowed into verse, and his custom was to write down what occurred to him, in such language and rhythm as came readiest to hand, and to preserve this rough and hasty sketch for future correction. In one place he speaks of the practice ascribed to Racine of writing out his plays in prose before he put them in verse, and is persuaded that, had he written in English, he would have availed himself of blank verse for this purpose. He is very much mistaken. The same practice has been ascribed to several eminent dramatic writers; but their object was not to have a crude first sketch to be part used, part rejected, and by degrees patched and cobbled into a poem; they desired to fix and give definiteness and precision to the conception which was to obtain poetical expression from another and different effort. Thus their system is the very reverse of his own. The one requires to build a framework of thought before it ventures on the execution, the other hastens to execution before either the thoughts or the form they should bear have been adequately conceived. Gray saw clearly the defectiveness of Mason's mode of composing, and animadverted on it, but it was too natural a result from the whole cast of his mind, for him to be capable of relinquishing it. The instance that called for Gray's stricture affords in itself a curious enough specimen of Mason's careless facility alike in producing and abandoning

his poetical offspring. Hot from the perusal of a fresh book, Keysler's "Antiquitates Selectæ, Septentrionales et Celticæ," he writes an ode, and, as usual, sends it straight away to his friend to receive a pruning and polishing from his hand. He has misgivings whether the whole thing is not wrong—whether "this sort of imagery may be employed. Will its being Celtic make it Druidical? If it will not, burn it; if it will, why scratch it *ad libitum*, and send it me back as soon as possible." Gray writes back, in his bantering way, with an indolent, easy contempt, softened by humour and affection:

"Dear Mason,—Why you make no more of writing an Ode, and throwing it into the fire, than of buckling and unbuckling your shoe. I have never read Keysler's book, nor you neither, I believe; if you had taken that pains, I am persuaded you would have seen that his Celtic and his Septentrional antiquities are two things entirely distinct."

After twitting him with filling his Ode with old German mythology and imagery instead of Celtic, he goes into some minutiae of criticism, and ends with this protest against Mason's practice of *drafting* his poems.

These are all my little objections, but I have a greater. Extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical, is one of the grand beauties of lyric poetry; this I have always aimed at, and never could attain; the necessity of rhyming is one great obstacle to it: another and perhaps a stronger is, that way you have chosen of casting down your first ideas carelessly and at large, and then clipping them here and there, and forming them at leisure; this method, after all possible pains, will leave behind it in some places a laxity, a diffuseness; the frame of a thought (otherwise well invented, well turned, and well placed) is often weakened by it. Do I talk nonsense, or do you understand me? I am persuaded what I say is true in my head, whatever it may be in prose,—for I do not pretend to write prose."

The process which the much-admired Epitaph on Archbishop Drummond's daughter underwent in its development, is the culmination of this mode of manu-

facturing poetry. Gray had sent the original cast home, with a number of special and some more general criticisms, and Mason throws it back on his hands, in the following characteristic manner :

"However, to show you my complacency, and in dread that you should ever do as you threaten, and call whatever I send you the most perfect things in nature, I will sacrifice the first stanza on your critical altar, and let it consume either in flame or smudge as it choose. Then we begin, 'here sleeps,' a very poetical sort of *ci-gît*, or 'here lies,' and which I hope will not lead the reader to imagine a sentence lost.

1. Here sleeps what once was beauty, once was grace,
2. Grace that with native sentiment combined
3. To form that harmony of soul and face,
4. Where beauty shines the mirror of the mind.
5. Such was the maid, that, in the noon of youth,
6. In virgin innocence, in nature's pride,
7. Blest with each art that taste supplies or truth,
8. Sunk in her father's fond embrace and died.
9. He weeps. O ! venerate the holy tear ;
10. Faith lends her aid to ease affliction's load :
11. The parent mourns his child upon her bier,
12. The Christian yields an angel to his God.

Various sections, pick and choose.

2. 'Inborn sentiment.'
3. 'Displayed (or diffused) that harmony,' &c.
7. 'That springs from taste or truth;' 'derived from taste or truth;' 'that charms with taste and truth.' But, after all, I do not know that she was a metaphysician, 'blest with each art that owes its charms to truth,' which painting does, as well as logic and metaphysics.

10. 'Faith lends her lenient aid to sorrow's load;' 'Faith lends her aid, and eases (or lightens) sorrow's load.'

11. 'Pensive he mourns,' or 'he views' or 'gives.'

12. 'Yet humbly yields,' or 'but humbly.'

Now if from all this you can pick out twelve ostensible lines, do, and I will father them ; or if you will out of that lukewarm corner of your heart where you hoard up your poetical charity throw out a poor mite to my distresses, I shall take it kind indeed ; but, if not, *stat prior sententia*, for I will give myself no further trouble about it ; I cannot in this uncomfortable place, where my *opus magnum sive didacticum* has not advanced ten lines since I saw you."

Gray's own method of composition was the exact reverse of that employed by Mason. He perfected every line as he wrote it, and never passed forward until he had succeeded in satisfying his own difficult requisitions of the excellence of that which went before. He wrote little pieces at a time, and added them up into a poem like a sum in arithmetic. Hence that want of continuity and amalgamation of parts which all nice observers detect in his poetry. The details are finished and ill put together; and not only this, but the larger sections of the poem are again ill cemented, and the whole becomes deficient in consistency and keeping. The poet not only works in mosaic, but too often on a confused outline. Yet these poems have a unity.

"There is," he says himself, in one of his manuscript papers, "a *tout ensemble* of sound as well as of sense in poetical composition always necessary to its perfection. What is gone before still dwells upon the ear, and insensibly harmonises with the present line, as in that succession of fleeting notes which is called melody." Gray's own poetry shows a nice appreciation of this truth. What is more important, his pieces possess in general, in spite of their patchwork character as to ideas and composition, real unity of feeling. And to this they owe a great part of their charm. The subdued evening pensiveness of the Elegy, the dejection of spirit that breathes in the Ode on a distant prospect of Eton College, the fervour that pervades the Bard, leaves some degree of singleness of impression, in spite of the laborious dove-tailing of which they every where bear the traces. These poems bear something the same relation to what poetry should be that a stained-glass window does to a painting; we admire it for the brilliancy of its colours and the harmony of its tints, and are content to forgive its broken parts, and the irregularity and insignificance of its designs.

Gray's habits of writing were closely connected with

his fundamental impressions as to the poetical art. In several passages in his letters he lays great stress on "expression," but he by no means attached the same ideas to the word that we modern readers are apt to do. A modern critic has told us that architecture consists in ornamentation. Every building must be well adapted to the purpose it is intended to answer—that is the first thing; and being so designed, the art steps in to beautify it. This is just Gray's idea of poetry. He considered it the art of adorning a thought. An idea with him was a nucleus around which to collect language; the iron wire which formed the skeleton of his basket of glittering crystals. He justly thought it essential that his meaning should be clearly expressed, and his image adequately conveyed; but this once achieved, it still remained to adorn it with select similes, choice epithets, and harmonious syllables, chosen for their own sakes, and not that they were required to clothe the poet's imaginations. Words *are* something more than the mere vehicles of thought; but if their independent qualities of form and sound afford new phases of beauty, and open wider fields to the imagination, they render them at the same time instruments more difficult to handle, and make them powers less easy to be subordinated. And it may be said that Gray was less the master of language than language was the master of Gray. Yet the genius of a poet is shown in his command over the instruments of his art. It is this which distinguishes him from those who can imagine yet cannot reproduce. It is an interior conception of his own which he should oblige language to vivify, and the haunting associations and suggestions of their own which words bring with them are valuable to him only as they enable him to image forth that conception with greater force and a more absolute completeness. One of the worst features in modern poetry is a tendency to write word-poetry, that is, poetry depending mainly on

the beauty of sound, form, and association in words. Tennyson has, perhaps, had a finer and subtler appreciation of this sort of beauty than any poet who ever lived, and has availed himself of it most successfully to convey a certain class of impressions, especially those which are aroused by the contemplation of particular aspects of nature. His followers have seen half way into the secret of his power, and endeavour to grasp his means, without caring to have any thing to convey—like a painter who neglects his subject for the sake of the brightness of his colours ; and even their master cannot always resist the temptation of allowing some notes to be heard for their own sweetness instead of for that which they contribute to the harmony of the whole. It is one of Wordsworth's highest merits that he is invariably direct and clear. He knows definitely what he has to say, and is led astray by nothing from the all-important object of saying it. He is eminently a poet of ideas, not of words. His excellence in this respect arises largely, however, from the absence of temptation, and he pays the ordinary penalty of losing something in power for what he gains in correctness. It is only occasionally that his poetry has the exquisite charm which a true use of the secondary beauties of language affords ; and his wants in this respect would be more felt were it not that his conceptions are rarely complex. In some great poets, especially in Shakspeare, there is an opposite leaning to that of which we have been speaking. So vivid is his conception, so overpowering his necessity to give it perfect form, that he seizes on the associative power of words almost independently of their direct sense, and leaves his meaning to rest in great measure on the atmosphere that hangs about his language, rather than on its dictionary meaning and grammatical construction. Thus an imaginative girl understands and cannot explain, while the learned commentators explain but cannot understand—

“Violets dim
And sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes,
Or Cytherea’s breath.”

Violets dim, says one, from their light blue colour ; from lying half concealed in their foliage, says another ; as if the value of the word did not depend on the impossibility of conveying the idea in any other form, and as if it were not in itself untranslatable, inexplicable, and all in all sufficient for any mind worthy to read it. So we have—

“Heaven’s cherubim
Horsed on the sightless couriers of the air.”

And even the self-controlled Milton speaks of

“Smoothing the raven down
Of Darkness till it smiles.”

Gray, as a poet, may be said to have studied words more carefully than the things they represent. He looked on a lay figure of nature. He had no thronging imaginations which required the vent of verse. He went abroad in search of ideas, and brought them home to amplify and adorn them. If the beauty of a word or a phrase struck him, he worked it into his general design as best he could—he could not afford to omit it. His imagination was at once vivid and sterile. He possesses isolated passages of remarkable force and beauty, and never sinks below a certain level ; but among the most remarkable characteristics of his mind, was an almost utter absence of creative or reproductive power, and an overpowering occupation with minutiae. Nothing came from him spontaneously. “If I do not write much, it is because I cannot.” His poetry was wrung out drop by drop, with an effort which soon became too great for his indolent nature. A life of moderate length sufficed only to produce a number of lines, which must be printed large to occupy thirty octavo pages, and from these six or seven must be deducted for translations.

His love of detail showed itself, not only in his minute attention to small points of criticism, but in the whole choice of his studies. In history, he was a chronologist and genealogist ; in art, an antiquarian ; and in natural history, devoted to nomenclature and the cataloguing of trivial observations. During the chief part of his life, he "kept a *daily* record of the blowing of flowers, the leafing of trees, the state of the thermometer, the quarter from which the wind blew, and the falling of rain ; these he entered into his pocket journals, in his delicate and correct handwriting, with the utmost precision, and sometimes into a naturalist's calendar in addition." Mr. Mitford tells us :

"Gray's copy of Verral's Book of Cookery, 8vo, 1759, is in my possession, and is enriched by numerous notes in his writing, with his usual minute diligence, and remarks on culinary subjects, arranging the subjects of gastronomy in scientific order. 1st. List of *furniture* necessary for a kitchen, which he classes under twelve heads. 2dly. List of such receipts as are primarily necessary in forming essential ingredients for *others*, all accurately indexed to their respective pages. 3dly. Five pages of receipts for various dishes, with the names of the inventors."

It is this over-balanced interest in details, acting under the influence of a highly-refined apprehension of beauty and fitness, that constitutes the peculiarity of Gray's poetry. He is the master of polished diction. Each separate particle of his poems has often force and exquisite beauty, but always finished propriety and perfect fitness of parts ; the choice of words is at once remote from sameness and from singularity ; and the rhythm steers a delicate medium at once remote from a dead level of smoothness, and from any approach to ruggedness. We read each period with delight, and are contented to seek our satisfaction in the perfection of each isolated part, without caring to observe that they are artificially connected, and that the poem itself is weak and objectless. It is true that Gray's taste, though

refined, is far from faultless, and was allowed too deliberate and cold-blooded a control over his imagination. Every phrase and every word was brought up for judgment, and condemned or accepted on grounds often too remote from the real conditions of the art. He made fancy fetch and carry for criticism, and fastened on his epithets like the spangles on an actor's dress. Yet it may be doubted whether his genius would have distinguished him apart from the nice perceptions of his taste. It may have been sometimes cramped by too arbitrary a control, but it scarcely possessed energy sufficient to be a law unto itself.

It is curious that, with his habits of mind, he should have become famous for obscurity of expression. It is a fact that can only be accounted for by the subordinate place he gave to sense compared with sound. He would at any time prefer to be incomprehensible rather than to repeat an epithet in the same poem. His allusions are sometimes too remote to be followed; at others, too general to be identified. The conclusion of the prophecy of the Bard affords a remarkable instance of the latter defect.

"The verse adorn again
Fierce War, and faithful Love,
And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest;
In buskined measures move
Pale Grief, and pleasing Pain,
With Horror, tyrant of the throbbing breast.
A voice, as of the cherub-choir,
Gales from blooming Eden bear:
And distant warblings lessen on my ear,
That lost in long futurity expire."

Gray grudged his readers a note to inform them that pale Grief and pleasing Pain, moving in buskined measures, was a special reference to Shakspeare, and that the voice, as of a cherub-choir borne from Eden, was that of Milton. In default of such information, fierce War, if it is to embody a like specific allusion, may

mean any body, from Fairfax to Marlborough, and Truth severe by fairy Fiction drest, may allude to the Fairy Queen or Rasselas, or any intermediate composition that answers to this wide description. That, in his secret heart, he was aware of the obscurity of some of his allusions and (though he makes a joke of it) that he was not entirely displeased at the idea that it should require learning to appreciate him, appears in a passage of one of his letters to Walpole: "I don't know but I may send him [Dodsley] very soon (by your hands) an ode to his own tooth, a high Pindaric upon stilts, which one must be a better scholar than he is to understand a line of, and the very best scholars will understand but a little matter here and there. It wants but seventeen lines of having an end. I don't say of being finished." This seems to be an allusion to his ode on the Progress of Poetry, on which one of his critics sententiously observes, that "being one of those that are willing to be pleased, he would therefore gladly find the meaning of the first stanza."

The peculiar trait of his fancy is to use allegory for the purposes of metaphor, and he pushes his personification so far, that the original meaning is often lost by the complete occupation of the reader's mind with the substituted image. A poet with a true instinct, however vivid may be the personality he assumes for inanimate objects, softens his image into unison with the actual impression he wishes to convey, by the vagueness of the accompanying conceptions playing upon the borders of the real and the assumed, and mingling the shades of metaphor and description. So Milton tells us that the moon,

"Apparent Queen, unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw."

Gray would have said she unveiled her peerless face, and clothed the form of Darkness in her silver mantle, or otherwise have conveyed the impression of a black

man in a white cloak. He constantly has such images as "Gay Hope by Fancy fed," which suggests spoon-meat irresistibly.

But it is easier to find defects in Gray's poems than to deny the attraction they possess both for the popular and the cultivated mind. He cannot be said to have had a great imagination, but the strength and vividness of his fancy were remarkable, and his inspirations, though rare, flashed forth with vigour when they did come. His mode of speaking of these visits is worth noting, as embodying a truth to which, we suppose, every real and self-observant poet would be a witness. "I by no means pretend to inspiration; but yet I affirm that the faculty in question is by no means voluntary; it is the result (I suppose) of a certain disposition of mind which does not depend on oneself, and which I have not felt this long time. You, that are a witness how seldom this spirit has moved me in my life, may give credit to what I say." Hereupon, the matter-of-fact Dr. Johnson, who made poetry by pure effort of diligence, as a man casts up his ledger, observes: "He had a notion, not very peculiar, that he could not write, but at certain times, or at happy moments, a fantastic foppery, to which my kindness for a man of learning and virtue wishes him to have been superior."

UNIDEAL POETRY : CRABBE.*

[January 1859.]

THE criticism of contemporary art cannot possibly be mature. No reader can avoid being influenced by the point of view from which he contemplates the subject of his observation. And as all art worthy of the name is, to some extent at least, permanent, it will always have a side addressed to ideas other than the prevailing ones of the time when it first appears ; and where the poet is of a wider-reaching imagination and insight than his critic, as every great poet almost always will be, this side will probably, for some time at least, be beyond the power of the latter to estimate, perhaps beyond his scope to perceive at all. Every new generation possesses new facilities for the estimation of a true poet. It can ascertain the judgment passed by those who have gone before ; and it can bring its own new knowledge and the fresh conditions of its own position to test the permanent truthfulness, wisdom, and beauty of the poems delivered to the ears of generations gone by. The true Temple of Fame is long in building ; every age reviews its proportions, adds a new stone, or tears down an unmerited decoration. Sometimes a hasty Tower of Babel soars into the skies in a brief ecstasy of popular applause, to be scattered for ever in scorn by the next comers ; sometimes the moss gathers over a few well-laid stones, destined after long years to be reverentially cleared and made the foundation of a monument lasting as the hea-

* *Life and Poems of the Rev. George Crabbe.* New edition. London : John Murray, 1853.

vens. The criticism of the literature of the day is, no doubt, the more immediate interest of the day ; but, even for the purposes of such criticism, it is well to secure those elements of comparison which are to be obtained by the occasional discussion of the productions of other writers than those who now first appear upon the stage. We shall treat these latter more broadly and more justly if we preserve our familiarity with those who have preceded them ; and, independently of this, it can never be without interest to record how a great poet appears to each new generation of readers.

Both the biography and the works of Crabbe are less widely read than they deserve to be. The poet in his lifetime enjoyed a wide popularity, which narrowed somewhat suddenly after his decease. His writings, on their first appearance, had an extensive body of readers, and gained the suffrages of the best qualified judges of his day. Burke first distinguished his rising genius. Fox and Johnson read him with pleasure, and condescended to correct him ; for a condescension it was esteemed on both sides, though corrections made under the influence of an external authority of this kind rarely fail to operate as deteriorations. Canning and Dudley North were warm in their admiration ; and Wilson and Jeffrey and Gifford agreed to applaud him. Sir Walter Scott, with his open-hearted enthusiasm, extolled him as a poet and welcomed him as a friend. Both *The Borough* and *The Village*, inferior as they are to *The Tales*, found readers throughout the breadth of the land ; and Mr. Murray paid him 3000*l.* for *The Tales of the Hall* and the copyright of the poems already published. But though that work too was well received, the interest in Crabbe's poetry receded so rapidly that the bargain proved more liberal than prudent on the part of the publisher. Most poets experience an ebb of reputation after it has risen to its first height ; and, indeed, their fame generally partakes of a periodical rise and fall, during which some are borne

higher on every succeeding wave, and others gradually stranded.

It is low tide with Crabbe just at present: the times of late have not been favourable to the appreciation of writers of his school. He may be considered as the last great poet who made man and the lives of men the direct subject of his verse. Modern poetry has occupied itself not with men, but with the ideas, the passions, and the sentiments of men; not with their lives, and not with their characters, but with detached incidents of lives and special traits or sides of character. The concrete man and the actual life have been subordinated to, or displayed only to throw a more vivid light on, the elucidation of feelings and ideas; and often these have been simply the feelings and ideas of the poet himself. The colloquists of *The Excursion* are not very ingeniously contrived mouthpieces for the contemplative imagination and meditative genius of the author. Byron wrote to vent his own passions—his anger, his wit, his chagrin, his love of beauty; Burns is either lyrical or satirical; and Shelley, singing like his own skylark

“Till all the earth and air
With his voice is loud,”

soars like it too into a region of thin air, native to himself, but removed far away from the working-day aspects and actual arrangements of human affairs. Tennyson, with far more power than any of these of entering into other minds and sympathising with varied feeling, is perhaps still less capable of dealing with complete character. He has painted not men, but present moods, and what may be called attitudes of mind, in men. In the softness of his outlines and the richness of his colouring he is most unlike the daguerreotypist; but he is like the manipulator in his main difference from a great painter. He gives a likeness from a fixed point of view; and, though a complete likeness, yet one of only a single aspect

of his subject : while a man like Rembrandt or Sir Joshua Reynolds, poring long upon a face, possesses the magic power of indicating something of the whole character in his one likeness of the countenance. Literary art for some years past, both in verse and prose fiction, has narrowed itself more and more exclusively to the exposition of the feelings and the description of nature. The thought itself which mingles in it is employed in reflecting on the influences of scenery and scrutinising the working of the heart ; and character has come to mean less what a man will think and do and appear under given circumstances than what he will feel.

It may be questioned, however, whether a reaction be not at hand. At any rate, we think the world of readers is ripe for it, if any writer shall be found powerful enough to raise the standard of revolt. War has shaken up the energies of the nation ; and we should not be surprised if it and some other influences should be found potent to disperse the too exclusive devotion to the affections which has long distinguished English art. Should our poetry turn to contemplate the more practical and every-day aspects of human life,—should it turn, we mean, from the passions and sentiments on which life revolves to the activities in which it is spent ; should it take to scanning moralities rather than feelings, and doings rather than contemplations,—it is probable that Crabbe will gain some meed of real attention more valuable than the uninformed acquiescence in eulogy which is pretty universally conceded to him.

He was born in the year 1754, at Aldborough on the coast of Suffolk. The scene of his birth and early life left an indelible impression on his mind and genius. It was in those days a rude village on the eastern coast, and combined much that is most repulsive in aspect and scenery with that particular picturesqueness, and to some minds even charm, which is often to be found in such situations. The coast for miles is a long line of rounded

flint shingle, edged at low tide with a narrow belt of sand ; on it the waves of the German Ocean, which has an air of grimness and inhospitality beyond most other seas, beat with an irresistible force, and make yearly conquests from the land. Sometimes on the wild winter nights the pilots and fishermen throng the beach, the anxious women clustering round them, and, powerless to carry aid across the curled and grating surges, witness with gloomy eyes the hopeless driving of some dimly-discerned vessel, whose gleaming lights express the terrors of the hapless wretches on board ; and sometimes the danger comes nearer home, and the raging billows, rushing beyond their limits, sweep away whole rows of cottages and plant the sea among their ruins. In a small and gloomy house with overhanging upper story, which has since thus perished, the poet was born.

The Ald, a navigable stream, passes by the little town, but does not there debouch into the sea. Turning southward, it runs parallel to the shore for several miles. The strip that for this distance separates it from the sea is waste and marshy, and the aspect of the whole rural district around is bare and poverty-stricken. It has been described by the poet himself, in lines to whose force and minuteness nothing can be added :

“Lo! where the heath, with withering brake grown o’er,
Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor ;
From thence a length of burning sand appears,
Where the thin harvest waves its wither’d ears ;
Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
Reign o’er the land, and rob the blighted rye.
There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
And to the ragged infant threaten war ;
There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil ;
There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil ;
Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf
The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf ;
O’er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,
And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade :
With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,
And a sad splendour vainly shines around.”

The inhabitants of this district were half peasants half smugglers, and the town itself was almost exclusively occupied by seafaring men, some of whom lived by the ocean and drew up their fishing and pilot boats on the beach, and others were employed in the inland traffic which passed up and down the river. A strong tide comes up the broad channel of the Ald to the town, and receding, leaves the muddy banks exposed :

“ Here samphire-banks and saltwort bound the flood,
There stakes and seaweeds withering on the mud ;
And higher up a ridge of all things base,
Which some strong tide has rolled upon the place.”

On this river is Slaughden Quay ; and here, in his father's warehouse, the young Crabbe was compelled to roll the cheeses and pile the butter ; duties harshly, but perhaps not unreasonably, imposed upon him while awaiting an opening for other occupation. His father was salt-master and a leading man in the little borough, though scarcely raised in social standing above the fishermen around him. But he was a man of vigorous mind and strong passions, fond of mathematical problems and a reader of Milton, subject to fits of gloom and anger, and though himself attached to his children, ruling them with a sway that made fear predominant over love in their minds. George's inaptitude in handling the tiller or the sheet called forth many a coarse and harsh rebuke ; but his father had sense to see the boy's superior mental qualifications, and strained his means to afford him the best education in his power. But not much time could be devoted to this object. He was destined for a surgeon, and at the age of thirteen first entered on his apprenticeship. He learned something of what may be learned by reading, and was specially attracted to the study of botany ; but he made no progress in what men gain by practice ; and when, after some years, he attempted to establish himself in Aldborough, the sense of his incompetency, and the idea that he might at any

moment be called on in some case requiring experience and manual dexterity, made him miserable. His musing habits inspired no confidence, and an active rival engrossed the little occupation there was. He himself declared that he turned to verse as a last resource for a livelihood. This is not altogether so, as from his boyhood he seems to have loved to express his feelings and ideas in rhyme ; but there is no doubt that the severity of his needs turned that into a systematic study which had otherwise perhaps only been an occasional recreation. He had a strong active mind ; he found he could turn a verse as well as another ; he liked the exercise, and had studied it ; others had lived by it, he conceived he might do the same. His professional prospects were hopeless, his dislike to the rude manners of those around him excessive ; and after long and anxious meditation, he resolved to give up the struggle to live as a surgeon, and to commit himself to the frail resources of a literary career in London. With a stock of his best verses, and three pounds in money, he sailed in the fore-castle of a sloop for the metropolis. This was in the spring of 1780.

There is no nobler instance of untiring industrious perseverance and cheerful fortitude than that displayed by Crabbe during his first year in London. Melancholy and misery at times no doubt laid heavy hands upon him ; but his was not the spirit to yield to the gloomy despair of Chatterton. His endurance was based on a simple but deeply-felt piety, which no disappointments could shake or even obscure ; and his spirits were supported by the steady attachment and lively spirits of his future wife. This was a Miss Elmy, a lady of some little higher social position than himself, and the niece of a Mr. Tovell, one of the old race, who, with an estate of some 800*l.* a year, called himself yeoman, and dined in his kitchen at the head of his domestics and labourers, while his wife shared the labours of the farm and

scrubbed the floor of the best apartment. Crabbe, who had made their acquaintance when surgeon's apprentice in the neighbourhood, had to bear many a rude jeer on his assumption of gentility and acquaintance with "the damned learning;" but he was well rewarded by securing the affections of the niece, whose sprightly letters and never-failing sympathy helped to support him through the lingering disappointments of his year of trial in London.

How he lived is a mystery. He seems to have had no resource except that of pawning his surgical instruments and his little stock of books. But his wants were few, and he entirely escaped those shiftless and dissipated habits into which men in his situation have so often been betrayed. For society he consorted with a few sober-minded young mathematicians, who met at a little coffee-house near the Exchange; and for recreation he walked to Highgate or Hornsey, and read Horace or Catullus in the country. His industrious days were devoted to the manufacture, remodelling, and writing out of poems. Bookseller after bookseller refused them; and when at last he succeeded in obtaining the publication of *The Candidate*, this single ray of hope was extinguished by the failure of the publisher.

It was a time when literature was shaking itself free from dependence on individual patronage, and learning to rely upon the wider and more wholesome approbation of the general public. But Crabbe, unable to obtain the opportunity of submitting himself to the world, unwillingly sought the protection of a patron. And now his troubles found an end; for after enduring his share of those slights and neglects which are the unavoidable stings of such a pursuit, and when on the eve of arrest for a debt of a few pounds, he was happy enough to be appreciated by one whose praise was an honourable distinction, and the nobleness of whose nature made his benefits at once large and easy to be borne. Edmund

Burke approved his poetry, made him the inmate of his house, and charged himself with the advance of his fortunes. Crabbe sat at his table, not like a tolerated client, but like a distinguished guest, and was introduced on equal terms to the best and most distinguished friends of his host. The politician in the hot turmoil of party life found time to stimulate and direct the poetical activities of the young author; and, stamped by his approval, *The Library* found a publisher in Mr. Dodsley, and gained applause from the circle of critics. Mr. Crabbe's son justly remarks, that the cultivation of his mind and the propriety of his manners must have been much above what could reasonably have been anticipated from the opportunities he had heretofore enjoyed, to give him at once so firm a hold upon the esteem and regard of such a man as Burke. It is clear that he required only to be known to gain the respect and regard of those with whom he came in contact. The kindness of Sir Joshua Reynolds called forth the warm and grateful feelings of the young adventurer. At his table he met Dr. Johnson, and the great literary dictator patted him on the head in his gloomy and solemn fashion.

To Lord Chancellor Thurlow he had before applied in vain, and had expressed his disappointment in some reproachful verses. The surly dispenser of church patronage now asked him to breakfast. "I ought to have noticed, sir," said he, "the first poem you sent me, and I heartily forgive the second." He pressed a hundred-pound note into his hand, and gave him promises of future assistance when he should have taken orders: for a way was now opened for Crabbe to gratify what had been an old predilection, and to enter into the ministry of the Church. And deficient as he doubtless was in the education appropriate to such an office, he had at least the qualifications of an unblemished life and a devotional spirit, to which he added sound sense and considerable general cultivation of mind; though his knowledge, as is

common with men who have not been regularly educated, or afterwards mingled in the world, was limited in many directions by walls of complete ignorance ; and with all his native intelligence and activity of mind, he cannot but have been deficient in that sort of culture which can only be gained by early and continuous intercourse with refined and educated society.

He was admitted to orders, and returned to Aldborough as curate to the rector of that place ; but remained there only a short time, having been received as the domestic chaplain of the Duke of Rutland on the recommendation of Burke. Treated with all courtesy, he has yet left unmistakable evidence in his poems that the restraints imposed and the observance required by such a position were galling to a spirit for which freedom and independence had a more than ordinary charm. Personally the duke and duchess treated him with a consideration and regard which left an ineffaceable impression ; but they could not alter the received conditions of his position. The chaplain of that day had risen far beyond his predecessor of a hundred years back. He was no longer a more or less privileged menial. Theoretically Crabbe was the equal of the titled and distinguished guests that thronged the ducal apartments of Belvoir ; practically he was made sensible of a perpetual condescension. It was for those around him to choose the degree of intimacy to which he was to be admitted ; it was for him to discharge his functions in the appointed routine, to furnish his society when it was wished for, and to withdraw from the conversation when it passed the conventional limits of clerical toleration. All this was not much to honest unsophisticated Mr. Crabbe's taste, nor had his life fitted him to move with ease in the scenes around him. He played his part as well as he could among the splendid hospitalities of the castle ; but was never so happy as when he could find opportunity, in the less formal life at the duke's more retired resi-

dences, to escape into solitude, and add to his collection of plants or ruminate over some additional verses.

In the year 1783 he published *The Village*. It was corrected by Johnson and Burke, and gained very considerable applause. Soon after he married the object of his long and faithful attachment, and spent the next few years in a curacy in the neighbourhood of Belvoir. In 1785 he published *The Newspaper*, which also was well received; much better, indeed, than it deserved.

It was twenty-two years before he again appeared in print. This time was spent in complete retirement from the world in different country parishes in Leicestershire and Suffolk. We do not propose to write a biography, but a criticism; and the incidents of a man's life after he has attained to maturity seldom afford much additional evidence as to his character. In the early part of a man's career we study how events and circumstances have acted on him; in the later part our attention is turned to the influence he himself has had upon affairs. This at least is the ordinary rule; and as Mr. Crabbe himself underwent no marked change or further development of character, and never mixed in any matters of external importance, it will be sufficient to sum up very briefly the remaining incidents of his life. In 1807 he published *The Parish Register*, the perusal of which in manuscript beguiled some of the last hours of Fox. In 1810 appeared *The Borough*, and in 1812 *The Tales in Verse*. After the death of his wife,—a loss he felt most acutely,—Mr. Crabbe moved, in 1814, from his rectory of Muston in Leicestershire to the living of Trowbridge in Wiltshire. Henceforward, after some thirty years of seclusion, he began again to mix somewhat in the world, visited London, and was caressed and fêted by the literary world of Holland House. In 1819 appeared *The Tales of the Hall*; and he who had made his first efforts under the auspices of Burke and Johnson, now reappeared

as the literary contemporary of Moore and Campbell. They and Mr. Rogers made much of the old gentleman. We have all seen such men of the past times, and know how they are received. The men respect them for past services, and yield them a cheerful half-ironic deference ; the women adore them, especially if they wear that air of antiquated gallantry for which Mr. Crabbe was conspicuous. Those who gain a reflected importance from knowing them, worship them with unaffected zeal. Mr. Crabbe's shrewd sense, simplicity, and old-world courtesy left a pleasant impression wherever he went. He passed some agreeable time in London more than once, and extended his journeys as far as Edinburgh, where he received a cordial welcome from his warm and genuine admirer Sir Walter Scott.

Meanwhile his long and active life sloped gently to its setting. His two sons were both married and settled in the Church ; and the domestic affections, which were strong within him, found resources in their children and homes. His mind throughout life had been ceaselessly active : he scarcely knew such a thing as rest except in the form of change of employment. Not poetry alone, but various other forms of literary effort, had been made the subjects of his unremitting industry. Works on botany, novels, sermons, and theological works, had been written, and many of them unsparingly committed to the flames. His intellect continued bright and occupied to the last ; and he left a volume of poems for posthumous publication, which, however, bear marked traces of the slackening influence of years. He died in the year 1832, at the age of seventy-eight ; and deep and sincere was the mourning caused by his loss, not only among his own parishioners, but among all the inhabitants—Churchmen and Dissenters alike—of the town of Trowbridge. "Poor Mr. Crabbe," said a very juvenile female parishioner, "never go up with white head in pulpit any more." Never any more.

It is a common, almost a universal idea, that a love of beauty is essential to the character of a poet. Some have even gone so far as to make this passion the basis of their theories of his art. It is obvious that a classification thus grounded goes far to exclude some branches which universally accepted language has always comprehended within the name of poetry. It is difficult to see the beauty of satire and epigram ; it is not very precise to ascribe that quality to wit or humour ; yet no restrictions of the theorist can avail to put Butler, Dryden, and Pope out of the category of poets. Crabbe presents difficulties still greater to the prevalent ideas on this subject. His position is perhaps more anomalous than that of any other English poet ; yet few, if any, will deny that he has an incontrovertible claim to the title. There is a sense in which he is the least poetical of poets ; there is another in which he is one of the most so. He is the plainest of all poets,—deals the least in ornament. When he gives you a simile,—as he sometimes thinks it his duty to do,—he puts it in perspicuously, adds it ostentatiously, like a Quaker sticking a flower in his button-hole. To a great poet metaphor is a more refined language, through which alone he can express his deeper meanings and hint his more refined ones. But Crabbe has no profound ideas, and no subtle ones. The common language of common men is abundantly sufficient to express what he has to say ; and it is rarely indeed that he travels beyond it. And yet he is a poet. He is a poet, moreover, without passion, and with only a steady tempered sympathy with the affections which he displays and the characters which he presents in his poems. He has none of that constructive genius which turns all the things it touches into harmonious wholes, and contrives to shed a grace of external form over the veriest trifles. He has no wit and no humour ; and without all this he is a poet. He is the last man to make himself, and the display of his own character, life, or feelings, the source of interest

to others. He gives no voice to our profounder thoughts ; he neither interprets Nature, nor reproduces her aspects of beauty with that richness of colouring which is the characteristic of modern poetry. He is much further from Tennyson, Wordsworth, Burns, Byron, and Keats, than any one of these poets is from another. In the plainness and commonplaceness of his ideas and language, in his absence of passion and profound insight, in his total disregard of beauty, Crabbe was no poet. Some will say nothing remains to make him one. We say, on the contrary, that he had in a high degree the one essential quality which all poets must have in common ; and that those things in which we have marked him as deficient, important and valuable as they are, are the accidents, not the essentials, of poetry. He had imagination. That man is a poet (though there may be no limit to his poverty and triteness) who takes up into the *receptive* imagination any matter whatever, and reproduces it in language under any of those rhythmical conditions which are accepted as forms of verse. There is no limit to this definition. A train of argument is not poetry ; and if there be such a thing as a man arriving at logical conclusions in rhyme, he is not making poetry. But a man who gives a metrical form to a conceived train of thought (as Dryden in the *Religio Laici*) is writing poetry ; and he who describes in the barest words the very commonest object he has once seen and formed a concrete idea of, is an artist and, if he uses verse, a poet ; he is a poet, that is, by definition. To be a great poet, indeed to be a poet at all in the higher sense in which we usually employ the term, a man must have a *creative* imagination : he must be able to make some new thing out of those impressions which he has received,—to “body forth the shapes of things unseen,” and by the fire of his genius to fuse and transmute into new forms the results of his experience, his insight, and his intuition.

It is imagination that constitutes the poet ; and one

half of imagination consists in the power to form vivid mental conceptions of the things which do exist ; in the power of gathering in a harvest of one's own from the external world. It is the high, the almost unexampled degree in which Crabbe possesses this power which gives him his place as a poet. He has little of the true creative power ; he is only just removed from an actual transcriber ; but he has a wealth of materials, a treasury of exact conceptions of existing things, which goes far to compensate a want of ingenuity in framing things new. We have spoken of the *receptive* imagination, and this adjective indicates the nature of the faculty in most minds ; it is generally to a great extent passive, and partakes of the nature of a mirror in which the images of outer things are reflected. But in some men it is a more active and aggressive power ; and this was particularly the case with Crabbe. His was a grasping tenacious imagination. Little Hartley Coleridge would have called it a "catch-me-fast" faculty. He was a man of keen observation, but also something farther ; he did more than see things ; he laid fast hold of them, and held them up as it were to himself for contemplation ; cast a vivid light on them ; and when he gave them forth again, he gave not the crude fact, but the impression he had taken of it. If he did not transmute experience into poetry, he yet did something more than simply translate it into verse.

He has not, indeed, that power which Giorgione among painters possesses in so high a degree, of making the image of an outward thing wear and express the mood of the artist's own mind ; as where he steeps in sadness, and almost in despair, the picture of a man playing, and two women singing, seated on the grass. Such an artist is like one who moulds gold, and stamps his own image on it ; but Crabbe uses, as it were, his own mind for the material, and stamps images of the external world on it. Every work of art is part gathered

from the external world, part the artist's own. In the first case we have cited, the artist shows himself in the superscription he leaves on his material; in the latter, he shows himself in the sort of substance in which the work is done. And this comparison of Crabbe's productions to a piece of metal bearing a defined impress may serve to contrast him also with another class of poetical minds. Some imaginations are like a sheet of clear water, in whose bosom is reflected the landscape around it and the sky above. As the water itself is part of the scene, so the man's nature seems to mingle with and be part of all that he conceives; and all things around him lean over him, and leave their shapes mirrored within him with softened wavering outlines, like the trees and towers in the lake, which partly seem watery images, and partly the water seems an inverted picture of the land. If the nature be deep and pure, and broad enough, such an imagination is great indeed; but if it be easily ruffled, or clouded, or small, it reflects but evanescent patches of truth and loveliness. Other minds,—and of such was Crabbe's,—have metal imaginations; the man himself takes hold of a thing as it were, and himself stamps it on the cold and hard but still receptive and tenacious material. The image remains, sharp, distinct, lasting; but rigid, colourless, and detached; and bearing with it in the very substance in which it is impressed an indis severable and unmistakable evidence of the poet's own nature.

Crabbe has nothing of the fiery and alert imagination. He cannot "turn and wind a fiery Pegasus;" but drives a steady unwinged horse at an even trot from period to period. His genius is no swift sparkling brook or broad shining river hastening through scenes of beauty to the sea; but is like the stream familiar to his childhood, rolling placidly and somewhat heavily along between its banks, laden with the common things appertaining to common men—hoys and brigantines and trading sloops.

Yet a strong imagination he undoubtedly had; and, what seems singular in looking at his writings, a musing temperament and a retiring nature. In reading Crabbe, one would naturally draw the conclusion that he had studied men from very close acquaintance with individuals, and had consorted with them much and familiarly. It is clear, however, that this was by no means the case. It is clear that he was never much at home in the society of others,—even the poor of his own parish; that he loved best to be alone with his own pursuits. He observed men closely; but it was as an outside spectator. “The author-rector,” says his son, “is in all points the similitude of Mr. Crabbe himself, except in the subject of his lucubrations:”

“Then came the *author-rector*: his delight
Was all in books; to read them, or to write:
Women and men he strove alike to shun,
And hurried homeward when his tasks were done:
Courteous enough, but careless what he said,
For points of learning he reserved his head;
And when addressing either poor or rich,
He knew no better than his cassock which;
He, like an osier, was of pliant kind,
Erect by nature, but to bend inclined;
Not like a creeper, falling to the ground,
Or meanly catching on the neighbours round:—
Careless was he of surplice, hood, and band,
And kindly took them as they came to hand;
Nor, like the doctor, wore a world of hat,
As if he sought for dignity in that;
He talk’d, he gave, but not with cautious rules,
Nor turned from gipsies, vagabonds, or fools.
It was his nature, but they thought it whim,
And so our beaux and beauties turned from him.”

When he was a boy, he did not mingle in the sports and occupations of those of his own age, but neglected school and playground alike for occupations and pleasures which indicate very clearly the peculiar character of his genius. He lived a life of the imagination as truly as any other young poet has done; but his was not

an imagination which could feast on its own dreams or soar unaided in the skies. It renewed its vigour by the touch of earth; it required a constant contact with reality, and sought an ever-fresh excitement in the transactions of men and the changes of nature.

“I sought the town, and to the ocean gave
My mind and thoughts, as restless as the wave;
Where crowds assembled, I was sure to run,
Heard what was said, and mused on what was done;
Attentive listening in the moving scene,
And often wondering what men could mean.
When ships at sea made signals of their need,
I watched on shore the sailors, and their speed:
Mix'd in their act, nor rested till I knew
Why they were call'd, and what they were to do.

Whatever business in the port was done,
I, without call, was with the busy one;
Not daring question, but with open ear
And greedy spirit ever bent to hear.

To me the wives of seamen loved to tell
What storms endanger'd men esteemed so well
What wondrous things in foreign parts they saw,
Lands without bounds, and people without law.
No ships were wreck'd upon that fatal beach,
But I could give the luckless tale of each;
Eager I look'd, till I beheld a face
Of one disposed to paint their dismal case;
Who gave the sad survivors' doleful tale,
From the first brushing of the mighty gale
Until they struck; and, suffering in their fate,
I long'd the more they should its horrors state:
While some, the fond of pity, would enjoy
The earnest sorrows of the feeling boy.”

In the shop of the craftsman, by the inn fireside, with the shepherds on the heath, even at the smugglers' hut between the rocks, the observant curious boy was to be found; and in lines more full of poetic feeling than are common in his writings, he describes his companionship with Nature: though here too he does not leave without a witness, as in his reference to the salt *taste* of

the spray, his fondness for the recording of minute observations:

"I loved to walk where none had walked before,
About the rocks that ran along the shore ;
Or far beyond the sight of men to stray,
And take my pleasure when I lost my way ;
For then 'twas mine to trace the hilly heath,
And all the mossy moor that lies beneath :
Here had I favourite stations, where I stood
And heard the murmurs of the ocean-flood,
With not a sound beside, except when flew
Aloft the lapwing or the gray curlew,
Who with wild notes my fancied power defied,
And mock'd the dreams of solitary pride.

I loved to stop at every creek and bay
Made by the river in its winding way,
And call to memory—not by marks they bare,
But by the thoughts that were created there.

Pleasant it was to view the sea-gulls strive
Against the storm, or in the ocean dive
With eager scream, or when they dropping gave
Their closing wings to sail upon the wave :
Then, as the winds and waters raged around,
And breaking billows mix'd their deafening sound,
They on the rolling deep securely hung,
And calmly rode the restless waves among.

Nor pleased it less around me to behold,
Far up the beach, the yesty sea-foam rolled ;
Or, from the shore upborne, to see on high
Its frothy flakes in wild confusion fly :
While the salt spray that clashing billows form
Gave to the taste a feeling of the storm.

Thus, with my favourite views, for many an hour
Have I indulged the dreams of princely power ;
When the mind wearied by excursions bold,
The fancy jaded and the bosom cold,
Or when those wants that will on kings intrude,
Or evening-fears, broke in on solitude ;
When I no more my fancy could employ,
I left in haste what I could not enjoy,
And was my gentle mother's welcome boy."

The fact is, the opportunities possessed by Crabbe for the study of life and character were, both from circumstance and temperament, much narrower than any one would conceive who judged from his writings. And thus he was in reality thrown more upon his imagination than we are apt to suppose. If he did not use it to create, he necessarily fell back upon it to piece out true conceptions from the hints which fell in his way. Like Professor Owen constructing a mastodon from a tooth, he employed himself in making out character from the casual traits which came under his notice. Invention in poetry is a cooler word of our forefathers for what we call creation; but, used in its etymological sense, it would serve well to describe Crabbe's mode of working. Observation was his ruling passion, and he carried into poetry exactly the same habits and indulged the same tastes as in natural history. In both alike he was intolerant of system and careless of inductions. The Vicar of *The Tales of the Hall*, contradictory as the descriptions may seem in some respects, is no less like him than the Author-Rector of *The Parish Register*:

“He much of nature, not of man, had seen,
 Yet his remarks were often shrewd and keen;
 Taught not by books t' approve or to condemn,
 He gain'd but little that he knew from them;
 He read with reverence and respect the few,
 Whence he his rules and consolations drew;
 But men and beasts, and all that lived or moved,
 Were books to him; he studied them and loved.
 He knew the plants in mountain, wood, or mead;
 He knew the worms that on the foliage feed;
 Knew the small tribes that 'scape the careless eye,
 The plant's disease that breeds the embryo fly;
 And the small creatures who on bark or bough
 Enjoy their changes, changed we know not how;
 But now th' imperfect being scarcely moves,
 And now takes wing and seeks the sky it loves.

He had no system, and forebore to read
 The learned labours of th' immortal Swede;

But smiled to hear the creatures he had known
So long were now in class and order shown,
Genus and species."

In one of his letters he describes and defends his immediate dependence upon the realities with which he came in contact:

"Yes, I will tell you readily about my creatures, whom I endeavoured to paint as nearly as I could and dared; for in some cases I dared not. This you will readily admit; besides, charity bade me be cautious. Thus far you are correct, there is not one of whom I had not in my mind the original; but I was obliged in some cases to take them from their real situations, in one or two instances to change even the sex, and in many the circumstances. The nearest to real life was the proud ostentatious man in *The Borough*, who disguises an ordinary mind by doing great things; but the others approach to reality at greater or less distances. Indeed, I do not know that I could paint merely from my own fancy; and there is no cause why we should. Is there not diversity sufficient in society? and who can go, even but a little, into the assemblies of our fellow-wanderers from the way of perfect rectitude, and not find characters so varied and so pointed that he need not call upon his imagination?"

The curious point is, as we have said, that these life-portraits were drawn, not from close association with the originals, but from very casual opportunities of knowledge; not from intercourse or any sort of sympathy, but from simple looking at them. "With men," he says, "I do not much associate; not as deserting, and much less disliking, the male part of society, but as being unfit for it; not hardy, nor grave, nor knowing enough, nor sufficiently acquainted with the every-day concerns of men." It is not exactly the idea one would form of Crabbe from his poetry, at least from a superficial perusal of it; but he was a soft-hearted old gentleman, and loved to be petted by ladies. "My beloved creatures," says he, meaning women, "have minds with which I can better assimilate."

It is with the poor, and those who constitute the

lower half of the middle class, that Crabbe chiefly deals. He says truly that these possess in their conditions of life more room for vigorous individual growth, and are less compressed by conventional habits into set shapes, than any others; but there was, if not a better, a more practical reason for his drawing from them. He had seen more of them, and therefore knew them better. With the exception of his brief stay in London and at Beaconsfield and Belvoir, he had, when he wrote, lived the life either of a country surgeon or a country clergyman, and had mingled little, if at all, in what the world calls society. Nor, if he had done so, was his a mind or an imagination to take cognisance of the finer *nuances* in which differences of character there display themselves. He could scarcely have studied men through their manners. He required marked differences, though they might be minute, showing themselves in marked characteristics, though they might not be obvious to a less close observer. It may even be said further that he lacked the power to appreciate any very finished degree of culture or extended reach of intellect. He revered and admired Burke and Fox; but they made no deep and abiding impression on him. When Moore and Rogers, anxious to secure any recollections of Burke which could be gathered from contemporary sources, came to consult Crabbe as to the conversation of his great patron, he could tell them nothing. He absolutely seems never to have formed an idea of the sort of men they really were.

But he could draw with an unerring pencil a Sir Denis Brand or an Isaac Ashford; he explored with wonderful accuracy the depths and shallows of minds, however singular, which were of a certain calibre only. His eyes were always directed on a level or downwards. Nothing escaped their keen and penetrating gaze but what was set too far above or beyond their scope. Within certain narrow limits of range he has displayed a greater faculty for marking and describing nice distinctions in

human character than any poet since Shakspeare. But it is not to be supposed he resembles Shakspeare. On the contrary, he stands as far apart from him as it is possible to do ; and this not only by the whole interval between richness and poverty of fancy, but by another characteristic, important indeed, but not very easy to describe. Shakspeare cannot touch a thread in the vast network of the universe, but the whole web seems to quiver under his hands and to vibrate in his imagination ; some haunting image of the whole breaks through and shines in each particular fancy. What most distinguishes him from every other poet is his strange intimacy with all the various relations borne by the matter he is handling to all other things, and his power by some rapid side-glance of indicating these relations, however remote and subtle. It would need his own command of language to describe exactly what this power is. We must be content to feel it, and to say, that it is as if he never detached a portion of the whole world of things, to deal with it ; but only occupied a part of it, leaving all its connecting links and clues of association unsevered and even undisturbed : as if he played each play of his on some plot of forest ground marked out only by the surrounding trees, between which, and through shrub and quivering foliage, we glance along the shifting and interminable vistas which penetrate the unbounded woodland.

Crabbe is the reverse of all this. His genius works in things limited and disconnected. He cuts you off a piece of human nature, and holds it in his hand for you to look at. He builds up separate little brick cottages of mortal characteristics, and is glad when he can get them to stand in a row ; then he makes a book of them. But his are no sham structures, no lath and plaster ; all his bricks are moulded of real human clay, his timbers are taken from the events of real life ; he bodies forth nothing but the shapes of things as they are. He is the antipodes of Shakspeare, because he is the plainest, the

most detached, the most matter-of-fact of poets; but he is the antipodes of Byron, because he is the most truthful and the most conscientious of poets. Byron's imagination was like some great bright reflector, of shining but uneven surface, in which are shaped brilliant but distorted images; Crabbe's was like a little square flat Dutch glass, which reflects a small area, but that exactly.

Closely connected with this side of his genius is another of the main characteristics of his poetry—the way in which all the more fine threads of intellectual effort and moral character in men are ignored—the manner in which every thing is stripped of the atmosphere which surrounds it and unites it to other things, and exhibited square and naked, without the softened outline and the grace which particular things derive from the fineness of the shades with which they pass into something else. He has no eye for the ærial softness and blended colouring of Nature. He describes with a hard resolute pen, idealising nothing; but, on the contrary, often omitting all that casts a veil over meanness and deformity. Yet it is a mistake to speak of Crabbe's pictures of life as gloomy; and Byron characterised him still less aptly when he styled him "Nature's sternest painter." There is nothing stern either in his disposition or his writings. A quiet kindliness prevails in both; he makes full, one might almost sometimes say undue, allowance for the frailties of human nature. He is neither exacting in his demands nor severe in his reprehensions. It is the very want of a high ideal, and of the softening and refining influence of a lofty imagination, which gives to his poetry that distinguishing character which is in reality neither gloom nor sternness, but rudeness, if it is to be characterised in one word. He had a mild disposition, but a certain harshness of mind. His pictures of Nature are naked, and in the worse sense of nakedness. He had nothing of that eye by which the sculptor sees in the figure of man the suggestion of the Apollo Belvedere;

he had not the power to pierce beyond the mixed deformities of human organisation; he had not even a pleasure in studying its higher types. Had he been a sculptor, he would have modelled the ungainly ploughboy or the warped artisan, not the athlete nor the hunter. The stamp of his birth and early education was effaced from his manners and his ordinary modes of thought, but was ineffaceably impressed in the deeper parts of his nature. There is something in seaside-dwelling men, especially of towns and of our eastern coasts, as if the salt spray and heavy winds had helped to mould them; it is not so much native coarseness as a sort of weather-beaten cast. Such men are resolute, but stubborn; they are daring, with a sort of moody contempt of danger, which they neither love nor care to avoid; hard, self-dependent, intolerant of weakness,—men who are accustomed to contend with difficulties below themselves rather than to avail themselves of advantages to rise; they have a nature tenacious, claylike—like clay too in being at once common and valuable. Doubtless Crabbe was very different from such men; but, softened and refined as he was, something both of the rudeness and the strength of this salt Suffolk blood lay about the base of his character.

He handles life so as to take the bloom off it. His way of viewing things is one which recommends itself to many minds, and in some moods to us all. Sometimes we cannot take wings, and ascend to the higher truths of existence and the more essential and more refined aspects of things. We ask for the coarse substantial certainties of common experience,—for sense, not only common sense but vulgar sense; we acknowledge our appetites,—bread, beef, and beer seem valuable; we lay hold of tangible ponderable certainties; we look on the landscape with an eye to crops, the great sea as a place to fish in and wherein to float steamers, and “the glorious sun himself” seems made to shine in at window. Such thoughts and

feelings are good for us at times ; these sorts of things are the rude foundation-stones of our lives, let them rise to whatever lofty purposes and spring with whatever beauty of carved arch and aspiring pinnacle into the heavens. It is steadying and sobering to turn sometimes to them, though it would be debasing to live too much among them. And Crabbe, with all his excellencies, his genuine simplicity, his uncompromising moral tone, his kindness, his manliness, cannot be said to be an elevating poet, or to exercise a refining influence. He paints correctly, but inadequately ; as if one should copy the Venus de' Medici with exactness, but in sandstone. Hence that disenchanting air which hangs over his works. He rises above it sometimes ; but it is the prevailing tone, and as such, has universally made itself felt. The swift aspirations, the winged hopes, the impassioned affections of men, the mystery of life, the problem of death,—you must not look to see these things touched upon ; but instead of it an unshrinking hand laid on all that lies bare to our sight, and a calm unharassed contentment to abide in the common and obvious conditions of human life. In his preaching as in his verse he was fond of what was tangible, plain, and practical. He was a tolerant man ; but the thing he had least tolerance for was enthusiasm, and the fervour of the Methodists and their sudden conversions were just the things to annoy him,—he wrote and preached against them with vehemence. On the other hand, he himself,—and it is significant of the state of the Church in his day,—earned the appellation of a “Gospel preacher,” implying that he was a little overstrained in his notions ; and this because he had some conviction of the intrinsic importance of religion, and preached a doctrine of future rewards and punishments, instead of simply drawing attention to the worldly advantages which follow in the train of prudent and not overstrained virtue.

He was a man rather of affectionate nature than of deep feelings, and it is very rarely indeed that he ven-

tures on the delineation of strong passion or uncontrolled emotion. He may describe the consequences of such things ; but he nowhere, so far as we can remember, gives them a direct voice. "Sir Eustace Grey," indeed, contains a forcible picture of terrors ; but it is an enumeration of past terrors, nor can we acquiesce in the place Gifford assigns it. Like every thing of Crabbe's, it is too defined, too explicit and limited. But the essence of terror lies in dim imaginations, in appeals to an unascertained capacity of suffering, in the stirring of dread and uncomprehended possibilities of pain. When we can gaze even the worst forms of anguish in the face, they lose much of their power of exciting terror. Sir Eustace catalogues the miseries of his madness and despair, and details the tortures inflicted on him by the fiends :

"Those fiends upon a shaking fen
 Fix'd me, in dark tempestuous night.
 There never trod the foot of men,
 There flock'd the fowl in wintry flight ;
 There danced the moor's deceitful light
 Above the pool where sedges grow ;
 And when the morning-sun shone bright,
 It shone upon a field of snow.

They hung me on a bough so small,
 The rook could build her nest no higher ;
 They fix'd me on the trembling ball
 That crowns the steeple's quiv'ring spire ;
 They set me where the seas retire,
 But drown with their returning tide ;
 And made me flee the mountain's fire,
 When rolling from its burning side.

I've hung upon the ridgy steep
 Of cliffs, and held the rambling brier ;
 I've plunged below the billowy deep,
 Where air was sent me to respire ;
 I've been where hungry wolves retire ;
 And (to complete my woes) I've ran
 Where Bedlam's crazy crew conspire
 Against the life of reasoning man."

This is forcible and frightful ; but it does not shake the spirit and make quail the heart, like some parts of De Quincy's description of the "Mater Tenebrarum." The only passion which Crabbe really moves deeply is the one to which he was himself most accessible, that of pity. A sort of quiet compassion is the mood in which he contemplates the sorrows and troubles of mortality ; and he excites the same feeling in his readers, not by any direct appeal, but by the tenor of his narrative and the contagious influence of his own temper. The description in "Resentment" of the abject wretchedness of the broken merchant contrasted with the unfeeling rigour of his prosperous wife, and especially those last lines in which the soft-hearted maid-servant has no eyes for the faults of her mistress in her remorse for the slowness of her own compassion, afford perhaps the best instance of his power in this direction.

It is curious that, with so sound a mind of his own, Crabbe loves to speak of and describe a disordered intellect ; and it is a proof of his penetration, that he traces the disordering influence of sin on the mind, and is not content with telling us how it affects the feelings only. In this direction he shows more insight than in any other ; and "Edward Shore" and "Peter Grimes" will always rank among his masterpieces. The former is a narrative the more striking perhaps from the unexaggerated diction in which it is clothed, and the homely simplicity of the reflections which accompany it. It shows how genius, grace, proud thoughts, and aspiring hopes to live true to a high ideal, may be no charm to secure their owner from the depths of human degradation, if they be but the furnishings of a self-centered heart and want the basis of pure principle to sustain them. It is useless to attempt to epitomise Crabbe's poems, and few can be ignorant of that remarkable history of genius and ambition traced through their alliance with unfenced passion and indulged pride to their setting in idiocy. It is in describing an

unsettled brain that Crabbe most often rises above the level of his ordinary strain, not only in his matter but in his utterance :

“That gentle maid, whom once the youth had loved,
Is now with mild religious pity moved ;
Kindly she chides his boyish flights, while he
Will for a moment fix'd and pensive be ;
And as she trembling speaks, his lively eyes
Explore her looks, he listens to her sighs ;
Charm'd by her voice, th' harmonious sounds invade
His clouded mind, and for a time persuade :
Like a pleased infant, who has newly caught
From the maternal glance a gleam of thought,
He stands enrapt the half-known voice to hear,
And starts, half-conscious, at the falling tear.

Rarely from town, nor then unwatch'd, he goes,
In darker mood, as if to hide his woes ;
Returning soon, he with impatience seeks
His youthful friends, and shouts, and sings, and speaks ;
Speaks a wild speech with action all as wild—
The children's leader, and himself a child ;
He spins their top, or at their bidding bends
His back, while o'er it leap his laughing friends ;
Simple and weak, he acts the boy once more,
And heedless children call him *Silly Shore*.”

The story of “the Parish Clerk,” long proud in his integrity, and boastful of his superiority to the weaknesses of those around him, betrayed into a system of pilfering the church offerings, and convicted at the altar before the whole congregation, is another instance of the same kind ; and the description of the effect upon the man furnishes one of the finest examples of Crabbe's poetical capacity, and of the power of his unadorned but vigorous imagination :

“He liv'd in freedom, but he hourly saw
How much more fatal justice is than law ;
He saw another in his office reign,
And his mild master treat him with disdain ;
He saw that all men shunn'd him, some reviled,
The harsh pass'd frowning, and the simple smiled ;

The town maintain'd him, but with some reproof,
 'And clerks and scholars proudly kept aloof.'
 In each lone place, dejected and dismay'd,
 Shrinking from view, his wasting form he laid ;
 Or to the restless sea and roaring wind
 Gave the strong yearnings of a ruin'd mind :
 On the broad beach, the silent summer-day,
 Stretch'd on some wreck, he wore his life away ;
 Or where the river mingles with the sea,
 Or on the mud-bank by the elder-tree,
 Or by the bounding marsh-dike, there was he :
 And when unable to forsake the town,
 In the blind courts he sat desponding down—
 Always alone ; then feebly would he crawl
 The church-way walk, and lean upon the wall.
 Too ill for this, he lay beside the door,
 Compell'd to hear the reasoning of the poor :
 He look'd so pale, so weak, the pitying crowd
 Their firm belief of his repentance vow'd ;
 They saw him then so ghastly and so thin,
 That they exclaim'd, 'Is this the work of sin ?'
 'Yes,' in his better moments he replied,
 'Of sinful avarice and the spirit's pride.
 While yet untempted, I was safe and well ;
 Temptation came ; I reason'd, and I fell :
 To be man's guide and glory I design'd—
 A rare example for our sinful kind ;
 But now my weakness and my guilt I see,
 And am a warning—man, be warn'd by me !'
 He said, and saw no more the human face ;
 To a lone loft he went, his dying place,
 And, as the vicar of his state inquired,
 Turn'd to the wall and silently expired."

"Peter Grimes" portrays the influence of a savage sort of remorse on a coarse and brutal nature. It is powerful but rude drawing, and a far more vivid and terror-inspiring picture of raving alienation of intellect than that contained in "Sir Eustace Grey." The image of the depraved and sullen criminal floating in his boat along some solitary reach of the stagnant river, and gazing on the water until the shapes of those he has murdered rise to taunt him with his sin, is oppressive

in its vividness and in the unsparing fidelity with which all the sad and foul aspects of the scene are catalogued, as if all the nature about him were in harmony with the callous heart of the sufferer.

Crabbe's writings cannot be said to be distinguished either by wit or humour. He sees the comic aspect of a matter sometimes, and reports it in a matter-of-fact deliberate way that has a pleasant air of quaintness, such as distinguishes "the Frank Courtship;" but there is nothing in his writings to laugh at. His bent is in another direction—to moralise; and it may be said that all of his poetry which does not consist in direct scrutiny of men themselves, is made up of observations on the moral phenomena resulting from their characters and actions. And here the same mind shows itself as elsewhere: you are not to expect what is subtle or profound, but what is sensible, keen, direct, and sagacious. Here, as elsewhere, he displays great acuteness, and little delicacy of perception. His remarks are all detached, and made without any view to general deductions. He collected the materials for his poetry in just the same way as he collected his facts in science; and both in poetry and science he showed himself absolutely destitute of the philosophic spirit. What he called botany, was gathering plants and knowing their names; entomology was collecting specimens of insects without even arranging them. He was satisfied with single links of knowledge, and never cared to discover how they made parts of a chain. He never reasons. He says many shrewd things, and some things, occasionally wise things, about human life, especially its moral conditions; but they are always things he has seen and noted, never conclusions he has deduced. Reading him is like going into a museum; you are introduced to a collection of human traits and experiences. He absolutely adds not so much to your knowledge of human nature as to your opportunities of studying it. He supplies you with new information;

but, just as is the case in a museum, the pleasure and advantage are limited. Once become sufficiently familiar with Crabbe to know what he has written, and there is nothing more to be gained from him. It is all patent. A man may read *Lear* ten, twenty, and a hundred times; and if his mind be awake, he will every time find something fresh, something he did not before know was there said, or implied, or hinted at. No man has a right to say he knows a single speech written by Shakspeare until he has learned it by heart, and thought on it night and morning. A man may read a page of Wordsworth, and think it commonplace; but, musing on it quietly and long, he will find a depth beneath its apparent platitude, and a harmony under its seeming ungainliness, which will find him food for his deepest meditations, and which daily converts sceptics of his genius into worshipers, the more inclined to blindness because they seem to work with the poet to their results. But Crabbe—you may read him twice; but you must be gifted with a short memory to enjoy him after this, except in some isolated passages which rise above his ordinary strain. “The Convert” is a clear piece of drawing; but one does not recur to the moral again and again:

“Unhappy Dighton! had he found a friend,
 When conscience told him it was time to mend,—
 A friend discreet, considerate, kind, sincere,
 Who would have shown the grounds of hope and fear,
 And proved that spirits, whether high or low,
 No certain tokens of man’s safety show;
 Had reason ruled him in her proper place,
 And virtue led him while he lean’d on grace;
 Had he while zealous been discreet and pure,
 His knowledge humble, and his hope secure;—
 These guides had placed him on the solid rock,
 Where faith had rested, nor received a shock:
 But his, alas! was placed upon the sand,
 Where long it stood not, and where none can stand.”

We are afraid Mr. Crabbe preached like that. Irreproachable sermonising, “sound,” and so forth; but ra-

ther in what has irreverently been called the "chopped-hay" school, and, at any rate, not good poetry. This sort of commonplace is, no doubt, interspersed with shrewd telling observations ; still, they are of the kind which bear their full meaning on the surface. You are not drawn into deeper thought ; but, on the other hand, as we have said, you often positively add to your knowledge about the habits of human beings. It is a sort of moral "animated nature." Thus :

"The boy indeed was at the grandam's side
 Humour'd and train'd, her trouble and her pride :
 Companions dear, with speech and spirits mild,
 The childish widow and the vaporish child ;
 This nature prompts ; minds uninform'd and weak
 In such alliance ease and comfort seek ;
 Push'd by the levity of youth aside,
 The cares of man, his humour, or his pride,
 They feel, in their defenceless state, allied :
 The child is pleased to meet regard from age,
 The old are pleased ev'n children to engage ;
 And all their wisdom, scorn'd by proud mankind,
 They love to pour into the ductile mind ;
 By its own weakness into error led
 And by fond age with prejudices fed."

For details he had a sort of passion, and his interest in them was proportioned to their smallness. Of all observers he is the minutest. In the world of natural history, of whose study, in a certain way, he was no mean proficient, he was always occupied in finding out and studying the small and insignificant tribes. Beauty invited him not the least. Among plants he studied grasses and lichens, or the least marked of the roadside flowers ; not, apparently, interested in plants like the cryptogams or others which might be supposed to invite by the singularity of their modes of growth, but attracted absolutely by insignificance and vulgarity. He loved weeds for their own sake. In zoology he took to entomology, and hunted down small beetles and flies. In his writings the same spirit is observable. He found no

subject too insignificant to be dwelt on, no trait too minute to be recorded. Hence a certain air of narrowness and pettiness distinguishes his writings. And he was moreover very insensible to the claims of proportion, and showed no skill in adjusting the detail of his treatment to the claims of the several parts of his stories. His son has some very just observations on this aspect of his mind :

“In fact,” he says, “he neither loved order for its own sake, nor had any very high opinion of that passion in others; witness his words in the tale of Stephen Jones, the ‘Learned Boy:’

‘The *love of order*—I the thing receive
 From reverend men, and I in part believe—
 Shows a clear mind and clean; and whoso needs
 This love, but seldom in the world succeeds.
 Still has *the love of order* found a place
 With all that’s low, degrading, mean, and base;
 With all that merits scorn, and all that meets disgrace.
 In the cold miser of all change afraid,
 In pompous men in public seats obey’d,
 In humble placemen, heralds, solemn drones,
 Fanciers of flowers, and lads like Stephen Jones;
 Order to these is armour and defence,
 And love of method serves for lack of sense.’

Whatever truth there may be in these lines, it is certain that this insensibility to the beauty of order was a defect in his own mind, arising from what I must call his want of taste. There are, no doubt, very beautiful detached passages in his writings,—passages apparently full of this very quality. It is not, however, in detached parts of a poem that the criterion of this principle properly lies, but in the conduct of the whole; in the selection of the subject and its amplifications; in the relative disposition and comparative prominence of the parts, and in the contrasts afforded by bearing lightly or heavily on the pencil. In these things Mr. Crabbe is generally admitted to be not a little deficient; and what can demonstrate the high rank of his other qualifications better than the fact, that he could acquire such a reputation in spite of so serious a disadvantage? This view of his mind, I must add, is confirmed by his remarkable indifference to almost all the proper objects of taste. He had no real love for painting, or music,

or architecture, or for what a painter's eye considers as the beauties of landscape. But he had a passion for science,—the science of the human mind, first; then, that of nature in general; and lastly, that of abstract quantities.”

By “science” as here used must be understood knowledge of facts; for Mr. Crabbe, as we have said, had not the least taste for the investigation of laws. In corroboration of his indifference to the charms of external Nature, may be cited a saying of his own, that he loved better to walk in the streets and observe the faces of the passers-by than to gaze on the finest natural scene.

The style of Crabbe is not less characteristic than his matter. It is not, however, so purely his own; and though he makes it the faithful instrument of his purposes, it always bears the traces of the model on which it was formed. Horace Smith called him “Pope in worsted stockings.” It would have been more to the purpose to say he was a new poet in Pope's stockings; for the likeness is in the superficies, and the contrast is in the substance. Crabbe formed himself on Pope's style, deliberately studied his mode of expression, and sought to catch his pointed way of putting things, in which, and not in the flow of his verse, lies the characteristic excellence of Pope's style. And Crabbe did attain this excellence to a certain extent. The points are much blunter, the polish is vastly inferior: but there is the same effort to afford a share of emphasis to every sentence, to give a sharp decisive accent of meaning to correspond with the marked accent of the verse; and a considerable degree of success attends the effort. It was an excellent school for Crabbe to be exercised in; his natural bent was to be dull, minute, and prolix. The study of Pope made him look out for rest at brief intervals, for contrast and relief. If we read some of his prefaces, we shall see what he might have been in verse had he not contended against his native propensities. He emancipated himself from being a proser. Poets, even good

poets, have not always done this. Rogers is a refined proser ; Wordsworth is a profound, a sagacious, a harmonious, and a most interminable proser. But, in substance, Crabbe differs widely from Pope. Pope is always employed in giving a specific shape to generalities ; Crabbe is occupied with things as they are. Pope, except when personal, was always working out results and deductions, making up thoughts and giving them a taking form ; Crabbe never wished to do more than describe graphically and agreeably (according to his notions of the agreeable in verse) what things he had seen and known. Pope's business, as he himself says, was to find rhymes for sense ; Crabbe's was, to find rhymes for facts. Pope studied society, manners, and man ; Crabbe studied social life, moral habits, and men. If he ever imitated Pope's matter, it was only in his very early poems ; and even his style lost its influence over his later poems, and very much to their disadvantage. He is not a master of expression. His language is the very reverse of suggestive. It is so bald and dry, that the reader must furnish all accessories from his own imagination. He must give colour and shading to the thought, he must improve the hint, and clothe the naked idea. Crabbe writes like one who draws outlines with a hard pencil ; and he who reads must employ a vivid fancy to fill them up. Moreover he has none of that power by which a great poet gathers up and compresses the details of his subject within the limits of the briefest general description. He is not a pregnant writer ; what he has to say, he says *in extenso* ; and though he is often curt, it is only as a way of filling up interstices and introducing or connecting pieces of prolix detail. Yet it is wonderful how much he contrives by this process to get into a small compass. This is particularly the case in his portrait-painting. He packs a complete and characteristic picture in very small space, and after a peculiar fashion. He does not, like Ben Jonson, and sometimes Dickens, take a distinguishing

humour or trait, or a set of these, and call' them a man : his people are real living people ; mere sketches often, no doubt, but exact, defined, and likenesses. Though he may imitate Pope in his style, he has none of his epigrammatic way of pinning a character down by a single prominent trait ; none of Wordsworth's habit of slowly winding it off as if it were a hank of cotton, and his poem a reel to wind it on. He sets to work in a way of his own, giving a brief, forcible, general description, and illustrating it by some dramatic speech or minor piece of description at full length. His pictures are like one of Grüner's plates of a painted ceiling, the whole drawn in outline and a corner filled up in colours. It is true, his early attempts savour more of direct and elaborate description both of things and persons, and that, where the subject suits him, he has few rivals in the skill with which he selects distinguishing points, or the aptness with which he conveys their effect through the medium of language. But when he is at his best, as in *The Tales*, the dramatic element holds a considerable space in his delineation of persons, and the peculiar style we have mentioned is seen in its perfection ; fading down in *The Tales of the Hall* into something too much of prolixity and mere conversation in verse.

Our limits afford no space for a detailed survey of his various writings. It was not until he discovered that his strength lay in the minute illustration of human character that he really enrolled himself among English poets. In his early poems, often even in *The Borough*, he shows too clearly that he is hunting about for matter for his rhymes, and making prize of every idea he can lay his hands on. As long as he is occupied with general ideas and thoughts, Crabbe is insufferably commonplace and dull. For one sound and novel aphorism, brightly and aptly expressed,—the sort of thing with which Pope's pages teem,—his imitator (for when thus employed Crabbe is a direct imitator of Pope) gives us a hundred

heavy disconnected sentences, which prance awkwardly up and down the verse like a cart-horse cantering after a thorough-bred. Thus, to quote the first specimen that offers :

“ Law was design’d to keep a state in peace ;
 To punish robbery ; that wrong might cease ;
 To be impregnable ; a constant fort,
 To which the weak and injured might resort.
 But these perverted minds its force employ,
 Not to protect mankind, but to annoy ;
 And long as ammunition can be found,
 Its lightning flashes and its thunders sound.
 Or law with lawyers is an ample still,
 Wrought by the passions’ heat with chymic skill ;
 While the fire burns, the gains are quickly made,
 And freely flow the profits of the trade ;
 Nay, when the fierceness fails, these artists blow
 The dying fire, and make the embers glow,
 As long as they can make the smaller profits flow ;
 At length the process of itself will stop,
 When they perceive they’ve drawn out every drop.
 Yet, I repeat, there are who nobly strive
 To keep the sense of moral worth alive ;
 Men who would starve, ere meanly deign to live
 On what deception and chicanery give :
 And these at length succeed ; they have their strife,
 Their apprehensions, stops, and rubs in life ;
 But honour, application, care, and skill,
 Shall bend opposing fortune to their will.”

The Library is pompous, pointless, and commonplace ; and the only thing that men have found worth remembrance in it is the description of the binding of old folios. Once or twice only in the whole course of it is to be found some stray couplet which points in the direction of the author’s real insight ; such lines, for instance, as

“ For transient vice bequeaths a lingering pain,
 Which transient virtue strives to heal in vain.”

However unadorned in statement, such a dictum indicates much of observation and something of wisdom in the writer.

The Newspaper is full of platitudes and pumped-up thought. It is a satire unrecommended by the force and brilliancy which alone can make satire endurable. The minor poems are simply unreadable. *The Library*, indeed, was published under the auspices of Burke; but if upon this poem alone he had formed his estimate of the author's genius, one would have said either that he had a very low idea of the requisites of poetry, or an almost supernatural insight into the germs of future success which lay hidden in the poem in question. But it seems it was on some very different lines, in *The Village*, that Burke rested his high opinion of the powers of his young client. They are lines which amply justify the prophecy of success; and, indeed, *The Village* stands quite alone among Crabbe's earlier writings. In it he spoke straight from his own personal convictions, he described directly what he had seen and known. The complexion of it differs from that of his other poems. It alone of his writings may with some degree of justice be called stern and gloomy. The struggle and the painful experience through which he was himself passing coloured the medium through which he looked. His picture of the life and sufferings of the poor in this poem leaves an indelible impression on the mind of every reader. It is not only that it is uncompromising, that it tears off and scornfully casts aside the old stage-costume of Corydon and Phyllis; but that it keeps aloof from all the sources of comfort and consolation, the common assuagements which are not denied even to the lowest aspects of human life, and builds in its forcible lines so sad a picture of unrequited and incessant toil, deserted old age, and miserable death, as none can look at without a shudder. And when, in the second part, he turns professedly to contemplate the

“Gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet repose,”

the subject leads him instantly to the vices which form

or accompany the amusements of the poor, and he immediately becomes absorbed in this, to him, more attractive subject. For force, aptness of language, fervour, and directness, the first part of *The Village* stands unapproached among Crabbe's early poems.

The Borough, with many parts and detached passages of first-class excellence, is a very unequal performance ; and it is not until the first series of *The Tales* that Crabbe's genius displays itself in its full power, and maintains a sustained and unwavering flight. It is on *The Village*, on detached parts of *The Borough*, and on *The Tales* (the second series of which is less fresh, graphic, and pointed than the first), that the permanent reputation of Crabbe rests. The posthumous poems cannot be said to be destitute of his peculiar merits ; but they must be confessed, on the other hand, to be very unworthy of what had preceded them.

The common feature throughout all his works which gives this author his hold upon his readers is his singular insight into the minute working of character, his wondrous familiarity with so vast a number of various dispositions, and the unerring fidelity with which he traces their operations and discerns their attitudes under every sort of circumstance. It would be difficult in the whole range of literature to point to more than two or three who have rivalled him in this respect. Chaucer is one ; and a curious and not uninteresting comparison might be instituted between the two, though the old poet far surpasses the modern one in love of beauty, liveliness of fancy, and breadth of genius. Crabbe knew where his own strength lay, and in some lines in *The Borough* has aptly described both the bent and the animus of his poetic powers :

“ For this the poet looks the world around,
Where form and life and reasoning man are found ;
He loves the mind, in all its modes, to trace,
And all the manners of the changing race ;

Silent he walks the road of life along,
 And views the aims of its tumultuous throng :
 He finds what shapes the Proteus-passions take,
 And what strange waste of life and joy they make,
 And loves to show them in their varied ways,
 With honest blame or with unflattering praise :
 'Tis good to know, 'tis pleasant to impart,
 These turns and movements of the human heart ;
 The stronger features of the soul to paint,
 And make distinct the latent and the faint :
 MAN AS HE IS to place in all men's view,
 Yet none with rancour, none with scorn pursue :
 Nor be it ever of my portraits told—
 'Here the strong lines of malice we behold.' ”

One great source of his strength is, that he dared to be true to himself, and to work with unhesitating confidence his own peculiar vein. This originality is not only great, but always genuine. A never-failing charm lies in the clear simplicity and truthfulness of nature which shines through all his writings. Nothing false or meretricious ever came from his pen ; and if his works want order and beauty, neither they nor his life are destitute of the higher harmony which springs from a character naturally single and undeteriorated by false aims and broken purposes.

UNIDEAL FICTION : DE FOE.*

[October 1856.]

THE modern novel is the characteristic literature of modern times. It is not difficult to detect some of the leading sources of its growth in the conditions and tendencies of modern society, especially in England. Increase of personal liberty has given increased scope and a greater common importance to individual life and character. A diminishing political and social restraint over men's lives, and a less urgent necessity for active personal engagement in political affairs, combined with a less formal and exigent code of manners in society, have endowed men with both more room and more leisure for the conscious determination of their own lives and characters. The sphere of human duty is not less wide and important than it used to be : but it is more voluntary—less under the law ; its claims are less engrossing and less exacting ; the relations to God are less distracted—less mediate—more comprehensive. A man may either live that he may act in a certain way, or he may so act that he may live a certain life and be a certain sort of thing. The facilities for the latter arrangement of existence are probably greater now in England than they have ever hitherto been in the world ; and the effects of a growing tendency in this direction are visible enough in our literature. An increased interest in our own characters has naturally given us an increased interest in the individual characters

* *Bohn's British Classics. De Foe's Works.* Vols. I.-IV. London, Henry G. Bohn. 1854, 1855.

of others ; and the examination and representation of character has been the most universal object of modern imaginative literature, its most special characteristic, and its highest excellence. The limits of the drama have not sufficed for its wants : it requires to display not only statical forms of character, but its development under the most varied and protracted circumstances ; and an intimate union of the dramatic and narrative modes of delineation has been contrived, to give scope to the new requirements of art. The same tendencies may be observed in other sorts of writing. They have somewhat warped history from its true model and objects, and they have given a higher and truer character to biography. The distinguishing use of history lies in the light it throws on the political and social nature of man. Its lessons are for the statesman and the citizen. It investigates, or should investigate, the principles of common human action in communities, and furnishes its students with comprehensive grounds for judging the tendencies and estimating the value of legislative changes. Its function is to supply men with guiding knowledge in their capacity as the members of a state. The object of biography is, or should be, to furnish as complete as possible a view of the whole character and life of its subject, both for the sake of its own interest, and as making additions to that sort of knowledge of individual men which may subserve others in moulding their own individual lives and characters. Modern history, as we might expect, tends too much to become biographical in its character ; while biography is far less content than it used to be with stringing together the events of a man's life, and aims at as searching as possible an examination and exhibition of the whole nature of the man. The same reasons that have tended to make character a more universal subject of study have also tended to give it a form which has made newer and more exhaustive methods of treating it more necessary for its exhibition. There are fewer

sharp diversities in character than there used to be. Men differ, not less completely, but less prominently, than they used to do : there is less one-sided individual development. When men are sharply constrained by an external power, which can grasp only a part of their nature, the very pressure there will make other parts of their nature start out in strange and abnormal excrescences. The more external restraint is removed, the more rounded and the more alike in their general aspects will be the forms of the single particles which together constitute society : differences of character become less apparent on the surface, and a finer discrimination, a more comprehensive insight, and a more delicate expression, are necessary to delineate its diversities.

Modern taste, accustomed to this more refined school of art, finds little to gratify it in the novels of De Foe. Neither his own genius nor that of his times was favourable to a compliance with its more recondite demands. The reigns of William and of Anne were any thing rather than adapted for the unhampered growth and quiet contemplation of character. They were filled with restless petty action. The liberties of the nation itself had been secured ; but the respective rights and claims of the several parties within the nation were never more undecided. It was a time of discord and jangling. Arbitrary invasions on the general liberty of the subject were replaced by harassing restrictions on the free action of certain classes ; and dangers important enough to unite the mass of the people in resistance had been replaced by a petty tyranny of disqualifications and fines over discordant minorities, which led an anxious life of mixed warfare and occasional conformity. In such times measures were more interesting than men, events occupied attention more than the study of character. And in such a time the natural bent of De Foe's genius to occupy itself with action and practical affairs was thoroughly confirmed by a long life of thankless political effort, conducted from so

independent a point of view as to expose him to the persecution of both the great parties of the day.

Human existence, in all its varied forms and conditions, was the one thing which interested him: but he busied himself rather with what men were doing than with what they were; with how they influenced the external world, rather than with how the external world influenced them. The modes of human life had a curious fascination for him. The way in which people lived and did things, and other imagined ways in which they might live and do the same or other things, were the matters which occupied his attention. The administration of affairs, the conduct of wars, the management of trade, the control of a household,—these were his favourite objects of contemplation. Great or small, they pleased him alike. The main labours, on which he spent nearly forty years of his life, were works of survey and practical suggestion in political and social affairs, often the most intricate and important; but he could turn with equal relish to discuss the “pride, insolence, and exorbitant wages of our women-servants” (though “they were pleased to say he undervalued himself to take notice of them”), and to make “proposals for the amendment of the same.” Even the most private and delicate arcana of domestic life were not too sacred to escape his curious observation and didactic suggestions.

His novels set forth not so much the life of a particular person as some particular mode of life. They tell us something that happened, or how things happened. Often the hero is a mere mouthpiece for a mass of adventures, told for their *own* sakes, and carrying their interest entirely in themselves, not deriving any from the light they throw on the supposititious narrator. The *Memoirs of a Cavalier* is De Foe's notion of how the civil wars were carried on. *Captain Carleton* is only a device to tell us what he knows of some of the Low Country campaigns, of Spain, and of Lord Peterborough's exploits

there ; and the *History of the Plague* is interesting as history, not as a personal narrative. Of these sort of things one asks, as the children do, "But is it all true?" It professes to be so ; every artifice is resorted to to make us believe it authentic ; and there can be no doubt that De Foe deliberately intended to pass these narratives off upon the world as literally true, and to obtain the advantage of the interest so excited. But as soon as you get to learn that they are not authentic their main interest is gone. The great mass of the facts may be true, but you have not the slightest clue to enable you to distinguish between the truth and falsehood of any of the minor and characteristic details : we can be sure only of those broad facts which we know to be true from other sources. In the whole range of imaginative literature there is nothing less satisfactory and more useless than this inextricable mingling of truths and figments. It is not history ; it is not fiction.

Where, as in Sir Walter Scott, you have an imaginative central interest confessedly fictitious, for which the real facts of history are used to afford a field, their own interest being only a subsidiary one, there, though the historical view may be distorted, and the facts inaccurate, they still have their true artistic bearing. There is a story ; and if that be good, we care comparatively little whether the historic material be in strict accordance with fact. We know Cromwell was not as he is represented in *Woodstock* ; the *Talisman* probably contains a not very correct view of Richard Cœur de Lion ; and one would not be willing implicitly to accept all Sir Walter's views of parties and characters in Scottish history ; but we don't read him for history, and we willingly accept for the time any view of historic personages which, without being glaringly inaccurate, subserves the interest of his romances. Where, on the other hand, a writer forms his own distinct conception of an historic personage or event, basing it on knowledge, and making it as true to the

reality as he can, he may legitimately, perhaps, give play to his fancy in inventing minor incidents and traits for the purpose of reproducing his conception in a work of art with greater vividness and completeness than he could possibly do, were he to confine himself to the bare ascertained facts. If a man is writing history or biography, such a latitude is clearly not to be tolerated, though often taken ; but such romances as *Harold* and *Rienzi* are doubtless permissible. When we peruse them, we lean on the author, and trust him just as far as we choose ; and we know ourselves to be reading, not history, but the impression history has left on a man of genius. But when a man bases the interest of his narrative on a mass of minute details about the real affairs of the world, professedly gathered by an eye-witness, the pleasure you derive from it is founded on the belief you have in its exact truth ; and as soon as you find that the Cavalier who gives you the benefit of his personal experiences was really a tradesman in London of a generation later, the book loses its value. The element of invention destroys the interest you would have had in it as a record of fact, and the inextricable element of real fact destroys your pleasure in the invention. You wonder at it, and are perplexed in the perusal ; if it retains any interest at all, it is due to the measure of probability that in the main it is still true.

And in De Foe's case this probability is very strong. His intense love for facts, and his very accurate and comprehensive knowledge and wide experience of the world of men, made him of all writers the one most able to give a true picture of, or at any rate a collection of true incidents relating to, any of the events either of his own times or of those sufficiently close to survive in the memory of the actors or their immediate descendants. On the other hand, his love of invention, his skill in giving the exactest air of reality to his fancied incidents, and his utter want of scruple in palming them off as

truths, leave it quite uncertain in what proportion such narratives as the *History of the Plague* consist of real incidents, and in what of manufactured ones so closely resembling the others as not to be distinguishable from them by any test we now have it in our power to apply.

Once resigning yourself to this inevitable confusion of truth and fiction, or rather consoling yourself with the reflection that De Foe's inventions are in such close harmony with the facts that surround them, that we may almost accept the whole as true, the graphic, matter-of-fact, direct, unadorned narrative has an irresistible charm. It is admirably adapted for the history of such an event as the Plague, whose reality leaves the uninformed imagination behind,—whose facts are more strange and frightful than the fancy, unaided by a knowledge of the reality, could ever have summoned up. In such cases, the plain bare recital of things just as they actually happened has a tragic power superior to any that genius, except perhaps of the very highest order, could confer upon them. We are comparatively familiar with the horrors of the time and its terrors ; with Solomon Eagle, with his pan of burning coals on his head, “denouncing of judgment upon the city in a frightful manner ;” and with the clergyman who went every evening through Whitechapel streets, repeating continually that passage from the Liturgy, “Spare us, good Lord ; spare thy people whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood.” We have heard “the fatal bellman,” and the rumble of the dead-cart through the darkness thick with pestilence ; have stood at the edge of the horrid pit, with its row of candles round it, and its busy and desperate buriers ; have seen the dead encumbering the highway, and the dying bursting like frantic ghosts from the imprisonment of their houses ;—but to give an impression of quiet desolation, we know nothing like De Foe's account of the solitary waterman, left alone among his dead neigh-

bours, and labouring for the support of his stricken wife and family.

"Much about the same time I walked out into the fields towards Bow; for I had a great mind to see how things were managed in the river, and among the ships; and as I had some concern in shipping, I had a notion that it had been one of the best ways of securing oneself from the infection to have retired into a ship. And musing how to satisfy my curiosity in that point, I turned away over the fields, from Bow to Bromley, and down to Blackwall, to the stairs that are there for landing or taking water.

Here I saw a poor man walking on the bank or sea-wall, as they call it, by himself. I walked a while also about, seeing the houses all shut up; at last I fell into some talk, at a distance, with this poor man. First I asked how people did thereabouts. 'Alas! sir,' says he, 'almost desolate,—all dead or sick; here are very few families in this part, or in that village,' pointing at Poplar, 'where half of them are not dead already, and the rest sick.' Then he, pointing to one house, 'They are all dead,' said he; 'and the house stands open, nobody dares go into it. A poor thief,' says he, 'ventured in to steal something; but he paid dear for his theft, for he was carried to the churchyard too, last night.' Then he pointed to several other houses. 'There,' says he, 'they are all dead, the man and his wife and five children. There,' says he, 'they are shut up, you see a watchman at the door;' and so of other houses. 'Why,' says I, 'what do you here all alone?' 'Why,' says he, 'I am a poor desolate man; it hath pleased God I am not yet visited, though my family is, and one of my children dead.' 'How do you mean, then,' said I, 'that you are not visited?' 'Why,' says he, 'that is my house,' pointing to a very low boarded house, 'and there my poor wife and two children live,' said he, 'if they may be said to live, for my wife and one of the children are visited; but I do not come at them.' And with that word I saw the tears run very plentifully down his face; and so they did down mine too, I assure you.

'But,' said I, 'why do you not come at them? How can you abandon your own flesh and blood?' 'O, sir,' says he, 'the Lord forbid; I do not abandon them, I work for them as much as I am able; and, blessed be the Lord, I keep them from want.' And with that I observed he lifted up his eyes to heaven with a countenance that presently told me I had happened on a man that was no hypocrite, but a serious,

religious, good man ; and his ejaculation was an expression of thankfulness, that, in such a condition as he was in, he should be able to say his family did not want. 'Well,' says I, 'honest man, that is a great mercy, as things go now with the poor. But how do you live, then ; and how are you kept from the dreadful calamity that is now upon us all ?' 'Why, sir,' says he, 'I am a waterman, and there is my boat,' says he, 'and the boat serves me for a house ; I work in it in the day, and I sleep in it in the night ; and what I get I lay it down upon that stone,' says he, showing me a broad stone on the other side of the street, a good way from his house ; 'and then,' says he, 'I halloo and call to them till I make them hear, and they come and fetch it.'

'Well, friend,' says I, 'but how can you get money as a waterman ? Does any body go by water these times ?' 'Yes, sir,' says he, 'in the way I am employed there does. Do you see there,' says he, 'five ships lie at anchor ?' pointing down the river a good way below the town ; 'and do you see,' says he, 'eight or ten ships lie at the chain there, and at anchor yonder ?' pointing above the town. 'All those ships have families on board, of their merchants and owners and such-like, who have locked themselves up, and live on board, close shut in, for fear of the infection ; and I tend on them, to fetch things for them, carry letters, and do what is absolutely necessary, that they may not be obliged to come on shore ; and every night I fasten my boat on board one of the ship's boats, and there I sleep by myself ; and, blessed be God, I am preserved hitherto.'

'Well,' said I, 'friend, but will they let you come on board after you have been on shore here, when this has been such a terrible place, and so infected as it is ?'

'Why, as to that,' said he, 'I very seldom go up the ship-side, but deliver what I bring to their boat, or lie by the side, and they hoist it on board ; if I did, I think they are in no danger from me, for I never go into any house on shore, or touch any body, no, not of my own family ; but I fetch provisions for them.'

'Nay,' says I, 'but that may be worse, for you must have those provisions of somebody or other ; and since all this part of the town is so infected, it is dangerous so much as to speak with any body ; for the village,' said I, 'is as it were the beginning of London, though it be at some distance from it.'

'That is true,' added he ; 'but you do not understand me right. I do not buy provisions for them here, I row up to Greenwich, and buy fresh meat there ; and sometimes I row

down the river to Woolwich, and buy there; then I go to single farmhouses on the Kentish side, where I am known, and buy fowls, and eggs, and butter, and bring to the ships as they direct me, sometimes one, sometimes the other. I seldom come on shore here; and I came only now to call my wife, and hear how my little family do, and give them a little money which I received last night.'

'Poor man,' said I; 'and how much hast thou gotten for them?'

'I have gotten four shillings,' said he, 'which is a great sum, as things go now with poor men; but they have given me a bag of bread too, and a salt fish, and some flesh; so all helps out.'

'Well,' said I, 'and have you given it them yet?'

'No,' said he; 'but I have called, and my wife has answered that she cannot come out yet, but in half an hour she hopes to come, and I am waiting for her. Poor woman!' says he, 'she is brought sadly down; she has had a swelling, and it is broke, and I hope she will recover, but I fear the child will die; but it is the Lord!'—Here he stopped, and wept very much.

'Well, honest friend,' said I, 'thou hast a sure comforter, if thou hast brought thyself to be resigned to the will of God; He is dealing with us all in judgment.'

'O, sir,' says he, 'it is infinite mercy if any of us are spared; and who am I to repine?'

'Sayest thou so?' said I; 'and how much less is my faith than thine!' And here my heart smote me, suggesting how much better this poor man's foundation was, on which he stayed in the danger, than mine; that he had nowhere to fly; that he had a family to bind him to attendance, which I had not. And mine was mere presumption, his a true dependence, and a courage resting on God; and yet, that he used all possible caution for his safety.

I turned a little away from the man, while these thoughts engaged me; for, indeed, I could no more refrain from tears than he."

Something similar to these quasi-historical pieces are such works as *Captain Singleton*, and the *New Voyage round the World*; but they differ from them in their interest lying in the invention displayed in fictitious narrative, to which a basis only of reality is given; and though the boundary which divides the two is as much

obscured as possible, they are sufficiently distinguishable in the main; and while we look on the curious incidental revelations as to the trade in the Spanish seas and South-American settlements as, no doubt, embodying reliable information of its kind, and on the general picture of Singleton's career as giving us some insight (gathered probably from De Foe's confabulations with old Dampier, with whom he used to talk over these matters) into the sea-life of the times, we are not in danger of being misled to believe in those pearl-gatherings in undiscovered and undiscoverable South-Sea islands, or that marvellous journey across the continent of Africa.

The proper novels of De Foe—*Roxana*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, and above all, the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*—are of a much higher class. They are pure fictions; any elements of fact which may be included in them being, as it were, entirely dissolved and incorporated in a homogeneous work of imagination. The most marked feature in them, the one which first strikes every reader that looks at them, is their reality, their life-likeness. Perhaps this quality would have been less remarked had it been more balanced by other qualities more or less common in works of fiction. As it is, it stands sharply out as the characteristic of De Foe, and is the index to a genius not more remarkable for its wonderful power in this direction than it is for its absolute deficiencies in another. Nowhere else does our literature show the trace of an imagination at once so vivid and so curiously limited. It is as if he had just one-half of that faculty we commonly call by this name. The imagination of Shakspeare is a universal solvent; at its touch the combined elements in man and circumstance fly apart, and reveal their secret and innermost constituent nature. This analytical power of genius,—a power, however, not of reasoning, but of insight,—furnishes the reservoir from which spring the fountains of creative genius; the more piercing that power, the clearer, the deeper, the more

shining will be the knowledge it amasses, and thence the more fresh, the more vivid, the more true the creations that are informed by it. With this searching insight, dividing like a sword the spirit and body of things, a great poet unites a passionate interest in concrete wholes, the realities of the created world, the very things which actually do exist ; and, to create new things like the old out of the resources of his penetrative genius is the highest ambition of his nature. Every artistic mind grasps at individual wholes ; but not to every one is given this power to reproduce them in the complex reality in which they exist in the living world. The most common poetic power is that which, by intermittent exertions of the faculty of insight or the sense of loveliness, grasps some fragment of the beauty of the universe and shakes out its hidden gold, or gathers some flying whisper of the world's harmonies and echoes it back in human language which illustrates some working passion ; gives a picture to some fleeting landscape, a voice to a sentiment, a mood, or an aspiration ; or freezes into language subtler than marble some passing incident as it sweeps swiftly down the never-returning current of time. These are simply expressive, and scarcely in any true sense creative poets. Others have a passion for creation, without a strong sense of the beauty of concrete wholes. These personify abstract emotions, dwell among ideas as contrasted with things ; if they create a man, they make him only the incarnation of a single passion, or of a set of opinions and feelings ; they don't feel that this is defective, that they are vivifying phantoms which want flesh and blood ; their imagination does not grasp at a passionate man, but at passions which it endows with the attributes of man. Such a genius delights in allegory more or less transparent. It rushes into personification—often of the thinnest description. Collins attempted a drama—he might as well have tried to square the circle ; the idea of a man never once probably pre-

sented itself to his mind; yet he could not help wrapping up in a hasty sketchy personification every idea that presented itself to him. When the traveller in the desert is likely to want water, he says

“Bethink thee, Hassan, where shall Thirst assuage,
When fails this cruise, his unrelenting rage.”

Spenser was a genius of this order; he is most at home and at his best when he is expending the glorious richness of his fancy in giving external form and appropriate environment to a passion or a vice, or some yet more abstract idea—as in his fine procession of Love, or that description of Mammon:

“An uncouth savage and uncivil wight,
Of griesly hew and fowle ill-favour'd sight;
His face with smoke was tand and eies were bleard,
His head and beard with sout were ill bedight,
His cole-blacke hands did seeme to have ben seard
In smythe's fire-spitting forge, and nayles like clawes appeared.

His yron cote, all overgrowne with rust,
Was underneath enveloped with gold;
Whose glistring glosse, darkned with filthy dust,
Well yet appeared to have beene of old
A work of rich entayle and curious mould,
Woven with antickes and wyld ymagery;
And in his lap a masse of coyne he told,
And turned upside downe, to feede his eye
And covetous desire with his huge treasury.”

By the wayside leading to which

“There sat infernale Paine
And fast beside him sat tumultuous Strife;
The one in hand an yron whip did strayne,
The other brandished a bloody knife;
And both did gnash their teeth, and both did threaten life.

On th' other side in one consort there sate
Cruell Revenge, and rancorous Despight,
Disloyall Treason, and hart-burning Hate;
But gnawing Gealosy, out of their sight
Sitting alone, his bitter lips did hight;

And trembling Feare still to and fro did fly,
And found no place where safe he shroud him might :
Lamenting Sorrow did in darknes lye ;
And Shame his ugly face did hide from living eye."

But Spenser's Red-Cross Knights, his Artigalls, his Guy-ons, are only coats of armour inspired with special ideas; even the girl-huntress Belphebe, his loveliest portraiture, is but the fair embodiment of fresh woodland virginity and pure animal spirits. Shelley, more intellectual, more subtle, yet less broad, was a poet of the same order, exercising his imagination on the qualities of things and facts, never on things and facts themselves.

Now De Foe shows the very reverse of this turn of mind; his genius stands in striking contrast to it. It is still more one-sided, and occupies just the ground which is left bare by such poets as Spenser and Shelley. He has nothing whatever of the solvent power. The strange underlying forces and essences which these minds love to contemplate as the component elements of the world have no interest for him. He abides in the concrete; he has no analytical perception whatever. Never was there a man to whom a yellow primrose was less, of any thing more than a yellow primrose. He is always occupied with the absolute existent realities of the world; with men as he saw them move in actual life; with facts as they actually happened. He never conceives abstract passions: his only idea of anger is a particular man in a passion. He has an enormous reconstructive and a very narrow creative imagination. He takes up things just as he finds them; and when he wants to create, he re-sorts them, or at most makes others exactly like them. He loses much by these limits to his nature. What he gains on the other side is that life-likeness we spoke of in his art: the narrow range of his vision is compensated by its vividness. It is a mistake to say that the wonderful power he has of convincing you that his characters really lived in the flesh, and that all he tells you did

really happen just as he says it did, arises from the minuteness of his detail. It is not the detail that causes the distinctness of the reflection in the reader's mind; it is the sharpness of the original image. A mind like De Foe's works by details; it is one of its defects that it does so. A greater genius can flash out as sharp and full an image of a concrete man as any of De Foe's, and unencumbered with useless minutiae. It can at once seize the very essence of some special attribute of human nature, and embody it in a complete and individual man. It can give you Claudio, Angelo, Lucio, Isabella, within the limits of five acts; and in doing so it furnishes, under stringent restrictions of form and in limited space, a greater variety of character than can be found within the whole range of De Foe's novels, and leaves as distinct an image of each man as we can form of the heroes of his most laboured autobiographical narratives. We don't say as familiar; but as distinct and as complete.

De Foe thus arrives by means of details at a result which may be reached independently of them; and his power lies not in his love of minute circumstance, but in the close and tenacious grasp of his imagination—in the constant and distinct presence before his own mind of the conception that controls and guides his minutiae. Richardson is far more detailed in his narration than De Foe, far more universally circumstantial, more diffuse, if possible, more tiresome; every matter that he has occasion to handle, whether important or unimportant, is elaborated with the same patient microscopic attention; he is thrice as tedious as De Foe; and yet his characters are infinitely inferior in life-likeness. Lovelace is a character more striking and more complex than Roxana or Robinson Crusoe; but you do not believe in his existence in the same way: he is more of a man in a book. De Foe's detail is a more partial and discriminating one than that of Richardson. True, he loves it for its own sake, and it is sometimes superfluous; but it is always

under control, and duly subordinated to the effect he wishes to produce. If we read him attentively, we shall be as much struck with what he omits as with what he inserts.

Totally destitute of the power to fathom any intricacies of human nature, De Foe is familiar with its external manifestations. He may have no conscious picture of *character*; but he has a keen eye for traits of character, and a very vivid idea of *persons*. He takes a man and his life in the gross, as it were, and sets them down in writing; but as it is his characteristic to be mainly occupied with the life, not the man, so this too becomes the main source of the reader's interest. It is not Robinson Crusoe we care about, but the account of his adventures, the solution of the problem of how to live under the circumstances. His name calls up the idea not of a man, but of a story. Say 'Lear,' and you think of a man; you have the image of the white-haired king—the central point, about which the division of his kingdom, the disaffection of his daughters, the terrors of the tempest, the soft pity and sad death of Cordelia, group themselves in subordinate place: say 'Robinson Crusoe,' and you see a desert island, with a man upon it ingeniously adapting his mode of life to his resources; the imagination of a solitary existence, reproduced in a special form with wonderful vividness, consistency, and particularity,—this is the source of our interest.

It would be to impugn the verdict of all mankind to say that *Robinson Crusoe* was not a great work of genius. It is a work of genius—a most remarkable one—but of a low order of genius. The universal admiration it has obtained may be the admiration of men: but it is founded on the liking of boys. Few educated men or women would care to read it for the first time after the age of five-and-twenty. Even Lamb could say it only "holds its place by tough prescription." The boy revels in it. It furnishes him with food for his imagination in the very

direction in which, of all others, it loves to occupy itself. It is not that he cares for Robinson Crusoe,—that dull, ingenious, seafaring creature, with his strange mixture of cowardice and boldness, his unleavened, coarsely sagacious, mechanic nature, his keen trade-instincts, and his rude religious experiences; the boy becomes his own Robinson Crusoe—it is little Tom Smith himself, curled up in a remote corner of the playground, who makes those troublesome voyages on the raft, and rejoices over the goods he saves from the wreck; who contrives his palisade and twisted cables to protect his cave; clothes himself so quaintly in goat-skins; is terrified at the savages; and rejoices in his jurisdiction over the docile Friday, who he thinks would be better than a dog, and almost as good as a pony. He does not care a farthing about Crusoe as a separate person from himself. This is one reason why he rejects the religious reflections, as a strange and undesirable element in a work otherwise so fascinating. He cannot enter into Crusoe's sense of wickedness, and does not feel the least concern for his soul. If a grown man reads the book in after years, it is to recall the sensations of youth, or curiously to examine the secret of the unbounded popularity it has enjoyed. How much this popularity is due to the happy choice of his subject, we may better estimate when we remember that the popular *Robinson Crusoe* is in reality only a part of the work, and the work itself only one of many others, not less well executed, from the same hand. No other man in the world could have drawn so absolutely living a picture of the desert-island life; but the same man has exercised the same power over more complex incidents, and the works are little read.

Moll Flanders and *Roxana* and part of *Colonel Jack* are not inferior efforts of the same genius that wrote *Robinson Crusoe*; but the subject-matter is perhaps less well adapted for the sort of genius, and they are defaced by much both of narrated incident and expression which

unfits them for the delicacy of modern readers. They are pictures of the career of vice. This is unfortunate; for had De Foe occupied himself with the domestic life of his period, and drawn his persons and incidents thence, he would have presented us with a more vivid glimpse into the life of his times than any author has ever done. Miss Austen is not unlike De Foe in some of the main aspects of her genius, though as much his superior in handling character as she is inferior in knowledge and vigour. Had he done as she has done,—had he drawn the Sir Walter Elliots and General Tilneys, the Captain Wentworths and Henry Crawfords, the Elizabeths, Anns, and Fannys of his time,—had he introduced us to the country-houses of Anne's or George I.'s time, as she has done to the Mansfield Parks and Longbourns of George III.'s, and brought to bear on them his superior sharpness of detail and wider scope of circumstantiality,—we should have gained a clearer idea of how people really lived in those days than can now be derived from all other sources of information put together.

But De Foe as deliberately chooses his materials outside the field of ordinary social life as Miss Austen sedulously restricts herself within it. The latter deals with baronets, dyspeptics, young ladies, and amiable or self-sufficient clergymen. She represents the condition of man as regulated by marriage with settlements; her widest contrasts of life are between Bath and Wiltshire, Plymouth and the Hall; she walks gently through the well-trimmed "shrubberies" of existence, and does not trust herself even to peep over the park-palings. De Foe goes down the ragged lanes, tramps through gorse and heather, sits by the side of the duckpond, and studies the aspect of the dunghill. Thieves and harlots, convicts, pirates, soldiers, and merchant-adventurers, are his *dramatis personæ*. He has never attempted to draw a respectable man; or if the narrative of the *History of the Plague* be an exception, he is placed amid terrors that

dislocate society and strip him of all the conventional proprieties which would naturally belong to him. He gives you no picture of the manners and the life of his times except incidentally, and by showing what strange things were compatible with them, and what sort of life those led who were outcasts from them. There are men who live in the framework of society. These are the respectable men of all classes; they accept the state of things into which they were born. To them the arrangements of society are not laws which may be broken, but conditions of the problem of life; they never feel the slightest temptation to infringe them. They are insensible to any hampering control from them: in fact, they are not controlled by them; conforming always to them, they have grown up into them as into a mould, which cannot press them because they fit it. These are the men who become lord mayors and presidents of council, who are respected by their neighbours and preside at quarter-sessions; men who, being bred tailors, aspire to be master-tailors; who, being lawyers, think of a puisne judgeship and never of jurisprudence; who are good church-goers in the country, or if born dissenters, adhere to their own communion; men who are capable of thinking and acting for themselves in all matters in which there is not an already fixed social canon of thought and social rule of action. Such minds give consistence, stability, and endurance to society: they inhabit, they constitute its substance. There are others whose character and destiny it is to dwell, as it were, in the interstices of that substance: they are impatient of the forms of social life; they shake off its artificial restrictions; they dare opinion; they love social adventure; they lead a freer life than the others, but a more dangerous one; escaping from constraint, they lose support; refusing the control of others, they lose a protection against themselves: they form a dangerous habit of disregarding authority and breaking through rules; not conforming to custom, they

lose many of the advantages of experience; and, deprived of external guards, are apt to find themselves on some sudden occasion not sufficient to themselves.

De Foe always chooses his heroes and heroines from among this latter class—often from among the lowest specimens of it; and the social conditions of his time offered him greater temptations for so doing than can operate on any writer in our times. The rules of modern society are by far less stringent and oppressive than those of an earlier time; but they extend much wider, and exercise on the whole a much more binding force. It is not that they extend to more classes than they used to do. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the different classes, more widely separated than they now are, had each its peculiar traditions and ideas as to how life ought to be conducted; and the tradesman was bound by as formal and exacting a code of social propriety as the peer. But the very markedness of the distinction between classes left a wider field in the intervals between them for the occupation of those who were not definitely included within them. In the present day class distinctions are much less abrupt; the borders between various ranks melt insensibly one into another; and social opinion, though not without its distinctions, is much more uniform both in its character and in its distribution. It is less of a chain binding the parts, and more of a net enveloping the whole; there is less formality, and more decorum; there is more freedom within the rules, but far more difficulty in escaping from them. It is scarcely possible now to exist as De Foe represents men doing—evading the social restraints, living in the world and yet out of society; dodging social laws, and shifting one's social relations, as may prove convenient for the time.

It is the same with legal restraints. Formerly punishments were vastly more severe than they now are; but the chances of avoiding them altogether were far greater. The criminal had a much more varied and extensive field

than he now enjoys. If you were taken stealing a watch out of a shop in good Queen Anne's reign, you were pretty sure to be hanged. But then, unless you were taken in the act, there was little or no danger of your being taken at all: whereas now you are sure not to be hanged; but, on the other hand, you have not a moment's peace of mind:—A l may at any moment disturb the harmony of a cheerful supper-party by tapping you on the shoulder, and telling you you are wanted about that little job in Fleet Street. The thief's life was formerly one of more varied enterprise than it now is: it is a profession which has gone down in the world. It no longer offers any temptations to a man of spirit. The main difficulty now lies, not in committing the robbery—this the modern police don't so much care to prevent—but in escaping detection afterwards, which they have made very difficult. Hence a shifting skulking character attaches to the business. A man who makes robbery his occupation finds no opportunity of relaxing in the society of innocent men; he cannot shake off the shop; he is confined within the atmosphere of his crimes. He cannot put his predatory habits off and on, and persuade himself that he is playing with them. In former times there was a reality corresponding more or less accurately to the high-spirited, adventurous, generous thief of romance; but the gentleman-thief, such as he was, is no more. The difficulty of stopping travellers by the Great Western, and the organised detective industry of Sir Richard Mayne's forces, have narrowed the limits of the art; and its professors are inevitably mean, base, and miserable.

De Foe puts his characters in degraded enough positions, and plunges them deep enough in the meanest criminality; but he was able to show them not absolutely dislocated from the regular order of society; they wind in and out from it, and retain some points of contact. There was then much less of a separate criminal class than now exists. It is still possible to use even the worst

members of this class as subjects of fiction, but not if you work in the same way as De Foe does. You can't show *all* the life as he does. Dickens paints the Jew, Sykes, Nancy, and the Artful Dodger, but not their actual lives and daily habits. He never shows them as they really are : he only selects the terrible, the ludicrous, or the pathetic incidents and points of character, and shrouds the stained every-day career of wickedness in silence. But De Foe gives all this ; to him one event is as important as another, nothing is too commonplace, nothing too revolting for his pen ; he slurs over nothing ; all is put down in its naked deformity, and, where it is dull and trivial, in its naked dullness and triviality.

Sir Walter Scott was the first to introduce a school of narration in direct contrast to this, and was, perhaps, the greatest master of it whom we have yet seen. He plays like sunlight over the summits of his subject, develops his story by selected scenes, throws into bright relief the distinguishing characteristics of the numerous *dramatis personæ* with which he crowds his canvas, and from the aspect in which they appear in special circumstances he skilfully gives you an insight into their whole nature. Think of the characters in any one of his best novels. Take *Kenilworth* : Elizabeth, Leicester, Amy Robsart, Varney, Mike Lambourne, Tony Foster, Janet, Giles Gosling, Goldthred, Wayland, Dick Sludge, the Pedagogue Tressilian, Sussex, Raleigh, Blount, with half a score more, all of them perfectly distinct life-like images, some more laboured, others just indicated by some light passing touch of the master's hand ; but all alike clear and cognisable. Observe the language they use. It seems the most characteristic in the world, and it is so ; but it is not what such people did really talk, any more than Hamlet really employed blank verse. It is an artificial language of Scott's own, always true in its essence to the requirements of character, and just sufficiently pointed with a flavour of the times in which the story is laid to

give it piquancy and *vrai-semblance*. There is an exquisite dexterity displayed in the employment of traditional and antiquarian knowledge, always used so as to give as true an effect as the author himself could conceive without any of the obscurity and pedantry of raw details. Scott has not the profound insight which a great dramatist requires, but he is essentially a dramatic artist in his mode of working.

De Foe is just the reverse ; his strokes are all of the same thickness, and he labours on with line after line and touch after touch, intent only on exact copying, and careless of the expense either of time or labour. He never drops his subject for an instant to take it up again at a more interesting point ; he tracks it like a slot-hound, with his nose close to the ground, through every bend and winding. He makes people talk as they really do talk. Scott makes a conversation of a few sentences convey what in actual life would probably occupy as many pages. De Foe gives you every word of it, traces it backwards and forwards through its repetitions, its half-utterances, its corrections, its misconceptions, its chance wanderings, its broken and reunited threads, just as people do really talk who wilfully or unconsciously are not very ready to catch one another's drift. *The Religious Courtship* occupies a pretty large volume. Most men would have found it difficult to spread the arguments over half-a-dozen pages. When a man of De Foe's vivid powers of conception tracks out with this slow perseverance the history of a life, it is impossible that we should not gather a very distinct idea of the person who lived it ; it grows up in a quiet and insensible manner out of the events. We are not expressly admitted by the author into the interior nature of such a person, but we know all of him which can be gathered from a complete acquaintance with the minutest circumstances of his actions, and often even of his thoughts. We must use our own insight and judgment if we wish to know what really was the interior

character of Moll Flanders, just as we must have done had we met her in life,—not altogether a pleasant sort of person. None of his heroes or heroines are. Roxana is not pleasant ; Colonel Jack is decidedly not pleasant ; Robinson Crusoe is not the man to make a friend of ; perhaps De Foe himself was not.

All these people are modelled on himself, and differ but slightly, except in their circumstances, from one another. Every man's imagination of other men gives you some clue to his own nature. You see the bent of it, at any rate. A man writing fiction is something like one in a dream, drifted hither and thither by the spontaneous working of his instincts and aspirations. He feeds his fancy by giving free play to the various elements in his disposition ; and in so doing he reveals more or less, not himself—for he is what his own controlling will and the discipline of circumstance has made him—but his natural constitution, that which may rightly be called his genius, though the word is habitually used with a more contracted signification. This unconscious self-revelation is remarkably full and explicit in De Foe, because, not penetrating into the interior of other men, he was thrown very much on the resources within himself. All his characters are woven out of the same thread ; they may differ in many ways, but in certain characteristics, and those the most deep-seated, they are like one another and like the author. It is the innermost part of his nature which a man can least shake off in his writings.

De Foe was a self-occupied man ; more, however, by nature than in his life. He was never a self-seeking man ; on the contrary, his whole life was a sacrifice of his own interests to those of truth and what he conceived the welfare of his country. Few men have left such a memorial of disinterested labour as his *Review*, written exclusively by himself, and published thrice a week, for many years, without profit or advantage ; and by its uncompromising rejection of party interests and single eyed

adherence to his own convictions, bringing odium on his head from Whigs and Tories alike, laying him bare to the attacks of his enemies, exposing him to countless dangers, and actually subjecting him to the grossest injuries,—slanders, law-suits, and imprisonment. Yet this Review itself bears evidence to the nature of the man in his anxious self-vindications, the constant reference to his own personal position, and his often and openly expressed sense of the importance of his labours.

“The author earnestly desired, and to his utmost endeavoured, to be for ever concealed: not that he was ashamed of the work, or sees any reason yet to be so; professing to have a firm belief, that he was not without a more than ordinary presence and assistance of the Divine Spirit in the performance. But being fully satisfied with the prospect of doing good by it, he desired that his ‘praise might not be of men, but of God.’

To this end, he took such measures at first for effectually preserving the secret, and for his entirely remaining in the obscurity he desired, that for some time after the publication he continued unguessed at; and he flattered himself for a while that he could be no further inquired after. ‘But Satan hindered.’”

The highest escape from the dominion of self may be said to have been closed to De Foe. It is where the intellect and the will are in constant activity under the control of the personal affections. Some men, and more women, can lose themselves in others. It is a great capacity to have; for in its highest direction and fullest development it is what the truest exponents of the Christian faith have in all times recognised as the fulfilment of the religious life. That is the service which is perfect freedom; but as the slavery to self is the most binding and oppressive of servitudes, so any degree of life in others insures, paradoxical as it may seem, its corresponding measure of freedom. This loss of self in others is not to be confounded with what in many outward respects resembles it, though in reality its direct opposite—the concentration of self in others; where one nature,

often in the worst indulgence of self-seeking, grafts itself on another, becomes dependent without ceasing to be self-engrossed, and, sacrificing the natural conditions of growth, limits itself to the sustenance and health it can derive from another stock, which often bears it as one of many branches whose fall would not touch its life and would scarce impair the fullness of its growth. Both these forms of self-surrender require strong affections of some sort. De Foe's affections were not strong; and he was neither in danger of the one, nor could avail himself of the other. It is true, as Mr. Forster has forcibly stated, that De Foe lived alone in the world. True, it is a noble thing to live alone in the isolation of great purposes, too great for the sympathy of a man's compeers; and that man's nature is the highest who feels most keenly the suffering of such an isolation—great as are its supports and consolations. But there is another loneliness, which comes from a want of warmth in the emotions, from an incapacity for strong individual attachments. Such a loneliness may be due to the deficiencies of a man's nature, not to the faults for which he is responsible; but it is an independence whose root is in wretchedness. Now De Foe lived partly, certainly, in the better isolation we speak of; but partly also in the latter. That he was not a man of strong or tender affections, his whole writings bear evidence. He never represents men as permanently bound together by affection. It costs him nothing uniformly to depict attachment as subordinate to interest. He shows husband and wife as united by common interests, common objects, or common duties; but rarely, if ever, by simple love. He has written one of the most moving passages that can be found in the range of English literature. It is the accidental meeting of a mother (a transported convict) with her son, born under tragic circumstances, and whom she had not seen since his earliest years. The father and the son pass by her accidentally in the plantation:

“I had no mask; but I ruffled my hood so about my face that I depended upon it that after above twenty years’ absence, and withal not expecting any thing of me in that part of the world, he would not be able to know me.—[This is the father.]—But I need not have used all that caution; for he was grown dim-sighted by some distemper which had fallen upon his eyes, and could but just see well enough to walk about, and not run against a tree or into a ditch. As they drew near to us, I said, ‘Does he know you, Mrs. Owen?’—so they called the woman. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘if he hears me speak, he will know me; but he can’t see well enough to know me or any body else.’ And so she told me the story of his sight, as I have related. This made me secure; and so I threw open my hood again, and let them pass by me. It was a wretched thing for a mother thus to see her own son, a handsome comely young gentleman in flourishing circumstances, and durst not make herself known to him, and durst not take any notice of him. Let any mother of children that reads this consider it, and but think with what anguish of mind I restrained myself; what yearnings of soul I had in me to embrace him and weep over him; and how I thought all my entrails burned within me; that my very bowels moved, and I knew not what to do; as I now know not how to express those agonies. When he went from me, I stood gazing and trembling, and looking after him as long as I could see him; then, sitting down on the grass, just at a place I had marked, I made as if I lay down to rest me; but turned from her, and lying on my face wept, and kissed the ground that he had set his foot on.”

This is intense, if not refined, pathos; but it is the description, not of affection, but of the maternal instincts; and De Foe’s power of entering, as he sometimes does, into this and similar instincts makes his silence on the subject of the more voluntary affections only the more remarkable. Another proof of the want of susceptibility in his own nature in this respect lies in the fact that he was not acutely sensible, as most men would have been, to the isolation of his position. It is true, as Mr. Forster says, that *Robinson Crusoe* could only have been written by a man of solitude and self-sustainment; but the passage he quotes from the preface to *Crusoe’s Serious Reflections*, in which the author urges the analogy between

the life of his hero and his own, marks decisively how little he felt that solitude. He indicates the analogy between the experiences of his own life and the adventures of Crusoe in every particular, excepting just his residence on the desert island:

“The adventures of Robinson Crusoe,” he says, “are one whole scene of real life of eight-and-twenty years, spent in the most wandering, desolate, and afflicting circumstances that ever a man went through, and in which I have lived so long a life of wonders in continual storm; fought with the worst kind of savages and man-eaters by unaccountable surprising incidents; fed by miracles greater than that of the ravens; suffered all manner of violences and oppressions, injurious reproaches, contempt of men, attacks of devils, corrections from heaven, and oppositions on earth; have had innumerable ups and downs in matters of fortune; been in worse slavery than Turkish; escaped by as exquisite management as that in the story of Xury and the boat of Salee; been taken up ill at sea in distress; raised again, and depressed again, and that oftener, perhaps, in one man’s life, than ever was known before; shipwrecked often, though more by land than by sea;—in a word, there is not a circumstance in the imaginary story but has its just allusion to a real story, and chimes part for part, and step for step, with the inimitable life of Robinson Crusoe.”

In his novels we see what might have been the character of De Foe, had not the conscientiousness of his will raised it above the tendencies of his nature. Crusoe may be said to be only deeply self-engrossed; but Moll Flanders, Roxana, Colonel Jack, and Singleton, are selfish to the last extreme of baseness: their whole lives are only one struggle to secure their own interests, regardless not only of the welfare of others, but of gratitude, natural affection, and decency. It may be said that this is only what is to be expected if a man is writing with unsparing exactness and fidelity the lives of thieves and harlots; but this is a trait that pervades them all so universally, and shows itself so exactly in the same kind of way, that it evidently has a deeper root than mere appropriateness to the characters of those represented. Moreover De Foe is

far from representing his characters as utterly depraved; and he is always anxious to point a moral. It seems strange to our juster notions of things,—and perhaps he wilfully deceived himself a little,—but he seems to have believed that he wrote these elaborate pictures of vice and wickedness with a direct moral purpose. “Throughout the infinite variety of this book,” says he in the preface to *Moll Flanders*, “this fundamental is most strictly adhered to: there is not a wicked action in any part of it, but is first or last rendered unhappy and unfortunate; there is not a superlative villain brought upon the stage, but either he is brought to an unhappy end, or brought to be a penitent; there is not an ill thing mentioned but it is condemned even in the relation, nor a virtuous just thing but it carries its praise along with it. Upon this foundation this book is recommended to the reader as a work from every part of which something may be learned; and some just and religious inference is drawn, by which the reader will have something of instruction, if he pleases to make use of it.” Thus (though these professions are not very adequately carried out) we see what the author’s intentions were; but though vices and dishonesties meet with a thin share of reprobation, and are followed sooner or later by remorseful repentance, a depravity of selfishness, which to the reader seems far more abhorrent, is passed over in all the silence of complete unconsciousness.

And with their selfishness and their insufficient affections, De Foe’s characters have that solitary independent course through life which naturally results from these defects, and which reflects back in an exaggerated form the independent solitariness of De Foe’s own life. *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, *Singleton*, *Colonel Jack*, all stand quite alone in the world. They are all single separate molecules, shifting to and fro in the wide sands of life—touching others, but never for a moment incorporated with them; they all live as using the world for them-

selves, and standing off from its binding influences ; they grasp at others for a momentary assistance, but they never allow another's claim to interfere with their own liberty ; they seize with the affections, but are never bound by them ; they may cling to another life, but it is with a reserved power of disengagement, as a limpet clings to a rock ; they never strike root in it, and grow from it, like a plant.

To turn to another point, in which the works give a glimpse into the interior of the writer. De Foe was very unfortunate as a trader ; the same strong imagination acting on practical subjects as is displayed in his novels, made him a reformer in society and also a speculator in business. He would seem to have been the very man to succeed in the latter function ; and his failure was probably due, as indeed he himself hints, to a distracting and overbalanced interest in the former direction, and to the literary habits it engendered. Whatever was the cause of his misfortunes, he showed himself in all his reverses a man of unblemished honesty and integrity. More, he showed himself often and under strong temptations a disinterested man. Yet in his heart he must have had an intense love of property ; in his novels he lets his passion for it run free. He gloats over money or bales of silk, over spices and pearls ; no sums are too large for him, no items too minute ; he delights in putting the values down in separate lines, and totting up the columns. He revels in doubloons and pistoles and "pieces of eight." Little inventories have an especial charm for him ; he always tells you exactly what his thieves' winnings amount to, and cannot for the life of him help looking at stealing as a sort of business, and secretly rejoicing when the profits come in. When he describes three young pickpockets going out, he has a certain reluctant sympathy with the "dexterous young rogues ;" and tells us : "The list of their purchase the first night was as follows :

"1. A white handkerchief from a country wench, as she was staring up at a jack-pudding ; there was 3s. 6d. and a row of pins tied up in one end of it.

2. A coloured handkerchief, out of a young country fellow's pocket, as he was buying a china orange.

3. A riband purse with 11s. 3d. and a silver thimble in it, out of a young woman's pocket, just as a fellow offered to pick her up.

N.B. She missed her purse presently ; but, not seeing the thief, charged the man with it that would have picked her up, and cried out, 'A pickpocket !' And he fell into the hands of the mob ; but, being known in the street, he got off with great difficulty.

4. A knife and fork, that a couple of boys had just bought, and were going home with ; the young rogue that took it got it within the minute after the boy had put it in his pocket.

5. A little silver box with 7s. in it, all in small silver,—1d., 2d., 3d., 4d. pieces.

N.B. This it seems a maid pulled out of her pocket, to pay at her going into the booth to see a show ; and the little rogue got his hand in and fetched it off, just as she put it up again.

6. Another silk handkerchief, out of a gentleman's pocket.

7. Another.

8. A jointed baby, and a little looking-glass, stolen off a toyseller's stall in the fair."

The account of how the little Colonel Jack and his friend the small Major dined on the proceeds of this enterprise is not to the purpose ; but is so happy an illustration of De Foe's wonderful power of realising the minutest traits in a person he has once conceived, that we cannot forbear quoting it :

"When we had thus fitted ourselves, I said, 'Hark ye, Major Jack, you and I never had any money in our lives before, and we never had a good dinner in all our lives : what if we should go somewhere and get some victuals ? I am very hungry.'

'So we will, then,' says the Major, 'I am hungry too.' So we went to a boiling-cook's in Rosemary Lane, where we treated ourselves nobly ; and, as I thought with myself, we began to live like gentlemen, for we had three-pennyworth of

boiled beef, two-pennyworth of pudding, a penny brick (as they call it, or loaf), and a whole pint of strong beer ; which was seven-pence in all.

N.B. We had each of us a good mess of charming beef-broth into the bargain ; and, which cheered my heart wonderfully, all the while we were at dinner, the maid and the boy in the house, every time they passed by the open box where we sat at our dinner, would look in and cry, 'Gentlemen, do you call ?' and, 'Do ye call, gentlemen ?' I say this was as good to me as all my dinner."

In his more fortunate days, after he has reached man's estate, Colonel Jack makes his fortune in Virginia ; and De Foe finds full indulgence for his fancy in making him trade with immense profits to Cuba and the coast of Mexico. There too, as in many other cases, he makes opportunities for the giving of presents, and rejoices in laying them out on the table and telling you how much every thing cost :

"This bale was, in general, made up of several smaller bales, which I had directed, so that I might have room to make presents, equally sorted as the circumstance might direct me. However, they were all considerable, and I reckoned the whole bale cost me near 200*l.* sterling in England ; and, though my present circumstances required some limits to my bounty in making presents, yet the obligation I was under being so much the greater, especially to this one friendly generous Spaniard, I thought I could not do better than, by opening two of the smaller bales, join them together, and make my gift something suitable to the benefactor, and to the respect he had shown me ; accordingly I took two bales, and, laying the goods together, the contents were as follows :

Two pieces of fine English broadcloth, the finest that could be got in London, divided, as was that which I give to the governor, at the Havannah, into fine crimson in grain, fine light mixtures, and fine black.

Four pieces of fine Holland, of 7*s.* to 8*s.* per ell in London. Twelve pieces of fine silk drugget and duroys, for men's wear.

Six pieces of broad silks, two damasks, two brocaded silks, and two mantuas.

With a box of ribands, and a box of lace ; the last cost about 40*l.* sterling in England.

This handsome parcel I laid open in my apartment ; and brought him up-stairs one morning, on pretence to drink chocolate with me, which he ordinarily did ; when, as we drank chocolate, and were merry, I said to him,—though I had sold him almost all my cargo, and taken his money, yet the truth was, that I ought not to have sold them to him, but to have laid them all at his feet, for that it was to his direction I owed the having any thing saved at all.”

In the substance of their constitution, still more than in special traits, do De Foe's fictitious personages echo back their creator. They have all a certain squareness and solidity ; they are all of hardy and stubborn materials. They put you in mind of timber ; they have no sensibility, no pliancy. The events of life make just such an impression as blows on a heavy balk of wood ; they bear the brunt and carry the dent it leaves, but the blow has no perceptible effect on them. The roughest treatment does but blunt their edges and tear off a few splinters. Theirs is never the elasticity which recovers from a blow, but the tough fibrous nature which a blow cannot permanently injure. Robinson Crusoe is the only one of De Foe's heroes who is at all sensible to the injuries of fortune ; and even he is only a little stunned by the worst that befalls him, and less by actual evils than the imagination of them—as when he sees the footprint on the sand. De Foe himself passed through a life crowded with troubles, but a small part of which would have shattered, or even killed, many men ; but they neither broke nor bowed him. Yet he had neither the levity which offers no resistance, nor the spring which casts off all the effect ; he knew all he had gone through ; he remembered the details of his sufferings ; he felt, and even deeply, but dully. He was pachydermatous, tough, and tenacious of life. Sensitiveness is generally a part of imaginative genius ; the same organisation which renders a man sensible to the finer and more elusive influences which surround

him, exposes a trembling sensibility to the touch of pain or annoyance, so that sometimes he becomes like him who was

“As a nerve, o’er which do creep
The else unfelt oppressions of the world.”

But De Foe’s genius had nothing of this character ; and as his nature qualified him to deal only with the grosser and more obvious facts of existence, so, on the other hand, it required a hard blow to hurt him. “Thirteen times,” says he, “I have been rich and poor ;” but he bore the vicissitudes of fortune with a cheerful sedateness which never failed him. He worked and lived, not like a winged Pegasus trampling the air, but like a serious laborious ox, dragging the slow plough through the long furrows, and rolling round a patient reproachful eye in answer to injury. There was nobleness too as well as constitutional phlegm in this patience of De Foe’s ; for it was certainly based, not only on his imperturbability of disposition, but in great measure on a trustful acceptance of God’s will, and a just reliance on the goodness of the cause he advocated.

His courage was of the same class. It was great, and did not fail him in arduous trials. Fear never could put him out of the course he felt called upon to follow. Still he recognised discretion as the better part of valour ; he had no love of danger ; and if it could be avoided without undue compromise, he was always willing to accept the terms. He had little or nothing of what we call spirit ; no sensitiveness on the point of personal honour ; injustice did not raise a fire in him, but a steady and resolute temper of resistance ; injuries could never excite in him a desire for revenge ; he replied to them by calm expostulation, or that sort of satire whose sting lies in its truthfulness,—a very thorough laying bare to day of his adversaries’ weak points. Swift, with his fierce gladiatorial spirit, struck him insultingly a backhanded blow ; to

which De Foe replied in a tone that rises something above his usual heavy strain, and which shows the fair, temperate, political tradesman in a far better light than the arrogant, conscienceless, political churchman. Among his contemporaries, the constancy with which he endured persecution, and the steady disregard of threats and indignities with which he persisted in his purposes, won him the reputation of "a man of true courage." For himself he lays claim only to a good cause :

"Fame, a lying jade, would talk me up for I know not what of courage; and they call me a fighting fellow. I despise the flattery; I profess to know nothing of it, further than truth makes any man bold; and I acknowledge, that give me but a bad cause, and I am the greatest coward in the world. Truth inspires nature; and as in defence of truth no honest man can be a coward, so no man of sense can be bold when he is in the wrong. He that is honest must be brave; and it is my opinion that a coward cannot be an honest man. In defence of truth, I think (pardon me that I dare go no further, for who knows himself?)—I say I think I could dare to die; but a child may beat me if I am in the wrong. Guilt gives trembling to the hands, blushing to the face, and fills the heart with amazement and terror. I question whether there is much, if any, difference between bravery and cowardice, but what is founded in the principle they are engaged for; and I no more believe any man is born a coward than he is born a knave. Truth makes a man of courage, and guilt makes that man a coward."

This courage of the conscience, totally unaccompanied by any love of danger, or of combat for its own sake, might be illustrated from many pages of De Foe's novels. It is in his life, however, that we must look to see his sturdy and obstinate yet temperate nonconformist spirit, and that direct uncalculating energy, that unquestioning conviction, that intense reliance on the effect of one's own individual exertion, that power of standing alone and acting unsupported, which have given, not to the government or the higher gentry, but to the body of the English nation, its distinctive and peculiar type of character; and which De Foe possessed in a degree so re-

markable, as to make him stand out perhaps of all Englishmen the most English our history can show.

In all his writings we trace an intellect corresponding to the nature we have endeavoured to describe. Like that, it was somewhat coarse in grain and confined in scope, but vigorous and powerful. A sort of Benjamin's portion of retail tradesman's mind, preserving the vulgar proportions and moving under the common conditions, but on a higher level of power,—a vessel of larger capacity and nobler uses, yet made of the same clay as the meanest. He has shrewd instincts, but cumbrous thoughts; he can express himself as fully, and even as fast, as you please; but not concisely. His ideas are heavy malleable metal, and he loves to hammer them out; his mind moves easily, but without spring, and he is a heavy hand at a joke. No one likes to call him dull, and there is a vigour in all he writes which redeems him from the charge; but tedious and intolerably self-repeating he undeniably is.

This is a defect, however, which shows less in his novels than elsewhere. He is a master in the art of narration, and for the mere telling of a story, does it better and more simply than any writer we have. His style in his novels is well adapted to the level of his subject. In itself it scarcely deserves the commendation it has received. It is like the manners of a farmer at an inn: a man of the best breeding could not be more at his ease; but it is because he submits to no artificial restraint whatever. In his works, written expressly for amusement or instruction, the plainness of his writing suits well with his plain rude way of treating his subject, and his complete insensibility to, and disregard of, any of its refinements or less obvious aspects. His shortcomings in this respect have been one great cause of the popularity these works have obtained, especially among the less-highly cultivated classes. Every reader feels competent to say as he reads, "This is true and life-like,"

—to follow his arguments, and to comprehend his reflections. It is this which made Lamb say he was “good kitchen reading.” Fielding is any thing but kitchen reading. A man must take pains with his education, and have a cultivated mind, if he intends to read *Tom Jones* so as to appreciate it. It has been called vulgar; it may contain vulgarities, but it is the least level to common capacities of any novel in the language; and De Foe’s novels are perhaps the most so. The wonderful thing is, the wealth of the mine he lays bare at this low level, and on these universal conditions. There must be something very singular in a work which the chimney-sweep and the peer both understand and both find interesting,—which the latter at any rate admires, and the former fully enjoys. This would be an easy triumph if it were gained by an appeal to, or a description of, the common feelings; but the characteristic of De Foe is, that he has written books universally popular, whose interest is quite independent of this universal resource.

His memory was a remarkable one, and he was widely and accurately informed in all those matters which a man learns by observation; and he had a signal power of gathering up that sort of information which is knowledge at first-hand, without requiring to be digested, and which is got through eye and ear rather than through books. His education had been good, but he appears simply to have mastered languages for practical use; to have accumulated the facts, not to have studied the ideas, conveyed in them. Though a wide reader, he was never interested in other men’s thoughts,—if he cites them, it is simply as authorities. When he himself thinks, it is (with rare exceptions) to direct practical issues; then he is sagacious, acute—even wise in broad every-day matters. Only in one direction did he indulge in any speculative thought, and only in this one direction did his imagination break through its ordinary matter-of-fact boundaries. He had a singular interest in the world of spirits. He

wrote a *History of the Devil*; and it is hard to say what object he proposed to himself in this amazingly tiresome, confused, lumbering work; a strange sort of half-serious, half-burlesque attempt to track the course of the great enemy's operations, criticising "Mr. Milton's" account of his fall, counting up how many names he has in Scripture, and apologising for still calling him "plain devil;" pursuing him through Jewish history, and partly through profane; inquiring, "What may probably be the great business this black emperor has at present upon his hands, either in this world or out of it, and by what agents he works;" and finally, discussing "his last scene of liberty," and "what may be supposed to be his end."

His *Life of Duncan Campbell* is another extraordinary production of the same class. It professes to be the history of a famous deaf and dumb wise man, who in those days had set up as a fortune-teller in London; and seriously accounts for his powers of penetrating futurity as derived from the second-sight and intercourse with the spiritual world. What grains of truth there may be in the book as a biography, and how far it is jest or grave hoaxing, and how far serious; how much of it the author himself believed,—it is impossible to tell. One can never say of De Foe, whether he was so fond of fiction he could never write unmixed truth, or so fond of exact truth as to spoil his hoaxes by making them too real. There is no joke in making people believe any thing short of what, at bottom, is a clear and palpable absurdity; and we are far from sharing in the modern astonishment, either that the public should at first have thought the famous tract on *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* was written in earnest, or that both Dissenters and Tories should have felt incensed against the author when it was found to be ironical. Much of it is common Tory argument and assertion, seriously and forcibly put; and the exaggeration of the conclusion scarcely, if at all, overstepped the limits of what might have proceeded

from the pen of a high-flying Tory enthusiast. The whole thing had no point except as coming from a Dissenter, and bore no evidence of doing so in the title-page or elsewhere. To have it written at all must have rubbed the sores of the Dissenters; and to find it was written in travestie exasperated their oppressors. The *History of the Apparition of Mrs. Veal* is a very circumstantial ghost-story, and now we think it a very good joke; but it was not meant as a joke, any more than the cures of bad legs that we see in the advertisements of quack ointments are meant as jokes. Very likely De Foe, in his own breast, enjoyed a grave sort of chuckle at the humour of making the apparition of "a maiden gentlewoman of about thirty years of age, who for some years past had been troubled with fits," appear to Mrs. Bargrave, and recommend the perusal of Drelincourt's *Book of Consolations against the Fear of Death*; but he never meant the public to share his amusement. It is one of the most remarkable exhibitions ever seen of a power of giving an exact air of reality to imagined facts. Its old formal precise air, our knowledge that it was got up to sell the book to which it was prefixed, and of the extraordinary success it had, amuse us who are in the secret. But De Foe did not mean it to amuse; he meant it to convince; he deliberately intended it as an imposition, and a most successful one it proved. There are plenty more such ghost-stories scattered through De Foe's works. Take the following, with its terrific vocal conclusion, as a specimen:

"In the year 1711, one Mrs. Stephens and her daughter were, together with Mr. Campbell, at the house of Mr. Ramells, a very great and noted weaver at Haggerstone; where the rainy weather detained them till late at night. Just after the clock struck twelve, they all of them went to the door to see if the rain had ceased, being extremely desirous to get home. As soon as ever they had opened the door and were all got together, there appeared before them a thing all in white; the face seemed of a dismal pallid hue, but the eyes

thereof fiery and flaming, like beacons, and of a saucer size. It made its approaches to them, till it came up within the space of about three yards of them; there it fixed and stood like a figure agaze for some minutes; and they all stood likewise stiff, like the figure, frozen with fear, motionless, and speechless. When all of a sudden it vanished from their eyes; and that apparition to the sight was succeeded by a noise, or the appearance of a noise, like that which is occasioned by the fighting of twenty mastiff dogs."

All we can say as to De Foe's way of regarding these and similar supernatural, or, as we choose to think them, quasi-supernatural occurrences is, that it is clear he was not prepared entirely to disbelieve; but this sort of stories, accompanied by direct strenuous assertions as to their truth in fact, and grave argument as to their bearing on unbelief, are chiefly remarkable for our present purpose as a further indication of the strange sort of confusion there seems to have been in De Foe's mind between real fact and possible fact. His imagination is so strong, that its facts seem to him of equal weight with those of memory or knowledge; and he appears scarcely to recognise the boundary between truth and fiction. His characters, as usual, carry the tendency a step further. They lie, to suit their purposes, at every turn, and without scruple or remorse.

De Foe was a man of strong religious convictions, and there is scarcely one of his writings which does not bear the impress of his deep sense of the all-outweighing importance of a religious life; and he can even venture to affirm, in one of his vindictory articles in his Review, that *Ad Te, quacunque vocas*, has been the rule of his own life. He had a strong sense of direct inspiration, even as guiding to or deterring from particular actions. Neither his genius nor his heart, however, were such as to give him any profound insight into spiritual relations. He had that sort of temperament which can feel and sympathise with sudden and violent accesses of somewhat coarse religious emotion, with too much

sense and staidness on the one hand, and too much conscientiousness on the other, to make him guilty either of the unseemly excesses, or the discordant self-indulgence, which distinguish the debased forms of so-called Evangelicism. All his characters repent in the same way ; they are suddenly stricken with an overwhelming sense, not so much of their guilt as of their crimes ; they are appalled to think themselves outcasts from God ; they lay down their evil habits,—generally when circumstances have removed the temptation to pursue them ; repent in a summary manner, and become without difficulty sincere penitents and religious characters. He has no sense of the temptations, the trials, the difficulties with which the souls of most men find themselves surrounded after they have once left home with Bunyan's pilgrim. He knows that strait is the gate, and sharp the struggle necessary to pass it ; but he always seems to forget that narrow is the way even after the gate is passed.

We have strict conventional rules in England as to what are to be considered readable books for society at large. It is scarcely necessary to say, that De Foe's novels are quite outside this pale. It is not that they were written with the least idea either of pandering to a vicious nature, or shocking an innocent one ; but they deal frankly with matters about which our better modern taste is silent, and use language which shocks modern refinement.

It is only fair, however, to say, they are in their essence wholesome, decent, and, above all, cleanly. They have neither the varnished prurience of Richardson, the disgusting filth of Swift, nor the somewhat too indulgent and sympathising warmth of Fielding ; they are plain-spoken and gross, but that is the worst of them ; and though the obvious and hammered moralities of the author seem valueless enough, it is to be remembered that the class whose rudeness would make it impervious to injury from the absence of delicacy in these works, is

just the one in a position to profit by their rough and primitive teaching. For those who seek it, they contain a deeper moral, not the less important because the writer was unconscious of its existence. They are warnings against the too common error of confounding crime and sin. They are the histories of criminals, who remind us at every page that they are human beings just like ourselves ; that the forms of sin are often the result merely of circumstances ; and that the aberration of the will, not the injury done to society, is the measure of a man's sinfulness. They show us among thieves and harlots the very same struggles against new temptations, the same slow declension and self-enfeebling wiles, which we have to experience and contend against in ourselves. We are too apt to think of the criminal outcasts of society as of persons removed from the ordinary conditions of humanity, and given up to a reprobate condition totally different from our own. One day we shall probably be surprised to find that, while right and wrong continue to differ infinitely, the various degrees of human sinfulness lie within much narrower limits than we, who measure by the external act, are at all accustomed to conceive. De Foe is a great teacher of charity ; he always paints the remaining good with the growing evil, and never dares to show the most degraded and abandoned of his wretches as beyond the pale of repentance, or unattended by the merciful providences of God ; nay, he can never bear to quit them at last, except in tears and penitence and in the entrance-gate at least of reconciliation.

W. M. THACKERAY, ARTIST AND MORALIST.*

[January 1856.]

WE are not among those who believe that the "goad of contemporary criticism" has much influence either in "abating the pride" or stimulating the imagination of authors. The human system assimilates praise, and rejects censure, the latter sometimes very spasmodically. A writer or labourer of any sort rarely profits by criticism on his productions; here and there a very candid man may gather a hint; but for the most part criticism is only used by an author as a test of the good taste of his judge. It is a fiction, in fact, long religiously maintained in the forms of our reviews, that we write for the benefit of the reviewee. In most cases, and at any rate in that of a mature and established author, this didactic figment would be as well put aside. A new work, a body of writings, by a man who has attained a wide audience and produced a considerable impression on his times, constitutes a subject for investigation; we examine it as we do other matters of interest, we analyse, we dissect, we compare notes about it; we estimate its influences; and as man is the most interesting of all studies, we examine what light it throws on the producing mind, and endeavour to penetrate through the work to some insight into the special genius of the writer;—and all this for our own pleasure and profit, not because we think our remarks will prove beneficial to him who is the sub-

* *The Newcomes*. By the Author of "Vanity Fair," &c. *Miscellanies, Prose and Verse*. By W. M. Thackeray. Vols. I. and II. London, Bradbury and Evans. 1856.

ject of them. Mr. Thackeray has outgrown even the big birch-rod of quarterly criticism. A long and industrious apprenticeship to the art of letters has been rewarded by a high place in his profession. He is reaping a deserved harvest of profit and fame; he can afford to smile at censure; and praise comes to him as a tribute rather than an offering. We propose, then, simply to say what we have found in the books we have read, and what light they appear to us to throw upon the genius of the author, more particularly in the two capacities we have indicated in the heading.

As an Artist, he is probably the greatest painter of manners that ever lived. He has an unapproachable quickness, fineness, and width of observation on social habits and characteristics, a memory the most delicate, and a perfectly amazing power of vividly reproducing his experience. It is customary to compare him with Addison and Fielding. He has perhaps not quite such a fine stroke as the former; but the *Spectator* is thin and meagre compared with *Vanity Fair*. Fielding has breadth and vigour incomparably greater; but two of his main excellencies, richness of accessory life and variety of character, fly to the beam when weighed against the same qualities in Thackeray. Fielding takes pride to himself because, retaining the general professional identity, he can draw a distinction between two landladies. Thackeray could make a score stand out—distinct impersonations. It is startling to look at one of his novels, and see with how many people you have been brought into connection. Examine *Pendennis*. It would take a couple of pages merely to catalogue the *dramatis personæ*; every novel brings us into contact with from fifty to a hundred new and perfectly distinct individuals.

When we speak of manners, we of course include men. Manners may be described without men; but it is lifeless, colourless work, unless they are illustrated by individual examples. Still, in painting of manners, as

distinguished from painting of character, the men must always be more or less subsidiary to their clothing. Mr. Thackeray tells us of a room hung with "richly carved gilt frames (with pictures in them)." Such are the works of the social satirist and caricaturist. He puts in his figures as a nucleus for his framework. A man is used to elucidate and illustrate his social environment. This is less the case with Mr. Thackeray than with most artists of the same order. He might almost be said to be characterised among them by the greater use he makes of individual portraiture, as he certainly is by the fertility of his invention. Still, at bottom he is a painter of manners, not of individual men.

The social human heart, man in relation to his kind—that is his subject. His actors are distinct and individual,—truthfully, vigorously, felicitously drawn; masterpieces in their way; but the personal character of each is not the supreme object of interest with the author. It is only a contribution to a larger and more abstract subject of contemplation. Man is his study; but man the social animal, man considered with reference to the experiences, the aims, the affections, that find their field in his intercourse with his fellow-men: never man the individual soul. He never penetrates into the interior, secret, *real* life that every man leads in isolation from his fellows, that chamber of being open only upwards to heaven and downwards to hell. He is wise to abstain; he does well to hold the ground where his preëminence is unapproached,—to be true to his own genius. But this genius is of a lower order than the other. The faculty that deals with and represents the individual soul in its complete relations is higher than that which we have ascribed to Mr. Thackeray. There is a common confusion on this subject. We hear it advanced on the one side, that to penetrate to the hidden centre of character, and draw from thence,—which of course can only be done by imagination,—is higher than to work from

the external details which can be gathered by experience and observation; and on the other hand, that it is much easier to have recourse to the imagination than to accumulate stores from a knowledge of actual life,—to draw on the fancy than to reproduce the living scene around us. The answer is not difficult. It is easier, no doubt, to produce faint vague images of character from the imagination than to sketch from the real external manifestations of life before our eyes; and easier to make such shadows pass current, just because they are shadows, and have not, like the others, the realities ready to confront them. But take a higher degree of power, and the scale turns. It is easier to be Ben Jonson, or even Goethe, than Shakspeare. In general we may say, that the less elementary the materials of his art-structure, the less imagination does the artist require, and of the less creative kind;—the architect less than the sculptor, the historian less than the poet, the novelist less than the dramatist. Reproducers of social life have generally rather a marshalling than a creative power. And in the plot and conduct of his story Mr. Thackeray does not exhibit more than a very high power of grouping his figures and arranging his incidents; but his best characters are certainly creations, living breathing beings, characteristic not only by certain traits, but by that atmosphere of individuality which only genius can impart. Their distinctive feature and their defect, as we have before stated, is this, that not one of them is complete; each is only so much of an individual as is embraced in a certain abstract whole. We never know any one of them completely, in the way we know ourselves, in the way we imagine others. We know just so much of them as we can gather by an intercourse in society. Mr. Thackeray does not penetrate further; he does not profess to show more. He says openly this is all he knows of them. He relates their behaviour, displays as much of the feelings and the character as the outward demeanour, the actions, the voice,

can bear witness to, and no more. It is exactly as if you had met the people in actual life, mixed constantly with them, known them as we know our most intimate friends. Of course this is all we can *know* of a man; but not all we can imagine, not all the artist can, if he chooses, convey to us. We don't know our nearest friends; we are always dependent on our imagination. From the imperfect materials that observation and sympathy can furnish we construct a whole of our own, more or less conformable to the reality according to our opportunities of knowledge, and with more or less completeness and distinctness according to our imaginative faculty; and every man, of course, is something really different from that which every man around him conceives him to be. But without this imaginative conception we should not know one another at all, we should only have disconnected hints of contemporary existence.

It is perhaps the highest distinguishing prerogative of poetry or fiction, or whatever we choose as the most comprehensive name for that art which has language for its medium, that it gives the artist the power of delineating the actual interior life and individual character of a living soul. It is the only art that does so. The dramatist and the novelist have the power of imagining a complete character, and of presenting before you their conception of it; and the more complete this is, and the more unmistakably they can impress you with the idea of it in its fullness and in its most secret depths, the nearer they attain to the perfection of their art. Thackeray leaves the reader to his own imagination. He gives no clues to his character, as such; he is not leading to an image of his own. He probably has a very distinct, but no complete conception of them himself; he knows no more of them than he tells us. He is interested more in the external exhibitions of character and the feelings than in character itself; his aim is not to reproduce any single nature, but the image that the whole phenomenon

of social life has left impressed on his mind. Of the tastes and temper that find their natural vent in this form of art he gives a picture in one of his books, which we have no doubt is life-like.

“If he could not get a good dinner, he sate down to a bad one with entire contentment; if he could not procure the company of witty, or great, or beautiful persons, he put up with any society that came to hand; and was perfectly satisfied in a tavern parlour, or on board a Greenwich steam-boat, or in a jaunt to Hampstead with Mr. Finucane, his colleague at the Pall-Mall Gazette; or in a visit to the summer theatres across the river; or to the Royal Gardens of Vauxhall, where he was on terms of friendship with the great Simpson, and where he shook the principal comic singer or the lovely equestrian of the arena by the hand. And while he could watch the grimaces or the graces of those with a satiric humour that was not deprived of sympathy, he could look on with an eye of kindness at the lookers-on too; at the roystering youth bent upon enjoyment, and here taking it: at the honest parents, with their delighted children laughing and clapping their hands at the show: at the poor outcasts, whose laughter was less innocent, though perhaps louder, and who brought their shame and their youth here, to dance and be merry till the dawn at least; and to get bread and drown care. Of this sympathy with all conditions of men, Arthur often boasted; he was pleased to possess it: and said that he hoped thus to the last he should retain it. As another man has an ardour for art or music, or natural science, Mr. Pen said that anthropology was his favourite pursuit; and had his eyes always eagerly open to its infinite varieties and beauties: contemplating with an unfailing delight all specimens of it in all places to which he resorted, whether it was the coquetting of a wrinkled dowager in a ball-room, or a high-bred young beauty blushing in her prime there; whether it was a hulking guardsman coaxing a servant-girl in the Park—or innocent little Tommy that was feeding the ducks whilst the nurse listened. And indeed a man whose heart is pretty clean can indulge in this pursuit with an enjoyment that never ceases, and is only perhaps the more keen because it is secret and has a touch of sadness in it; because he is of his mood and humour lonely, and apart although not alone.”

Individual character, however, is the deeper and more interesting study; and the writings prompted by genius

which delights more in the habits and qualities and casual self-delineations of man than in man himself, always disappoint us by our half-acquaintance with the personages of the story. As for the subsidiary middle-distance people, this matters little. We know as much as we wish to do of Sir Pitt Crawley, of Lord Steyne, of the Major, of Jack Belsize, of Mrs. Hobson Newcome, of Mrs. Mackenzie; but how glad should we be to see more into the real heart of Major Dobbin, of Becky, even of Osborne, of Warrington, of Laura! Even of shallow and worldly Pendennis, how partial and limited, how merely external, is our conception! What do we know really of the Colonel, beyond that atmosphere of kindness and honesty which surrounds one of the most delightful creations poet ever drew? But why complain? Distinctness and completeness of conception are two qualities divided among artists; to one this, to the other that; rarely, perhaps never, has any single man been gifted with a large measure of both. If Mr. Thackeray's genius is not of the very highest order, it is the very highest of its kind. The vividness, the accuracy of his delineation goes far to compensate for a certain want of deeper insight. Let us be grateful for what he gives us, rather than grumble because it is not more. Let us take him as that which he is—a daguerreotypist of the world about us. He is great in costume, in minutiae too great; he leans too much on them; his figures are to Shakspeare's what Madame Tussaud's wax-works are to the Elgin Marbles—they are exact figures from modern life, and the resemblance is effected somewhat too much by the aid of externals; but there is a matchless sharpness, an elaborateness and finish of detail and circumstantiality about his creations. He has an art peculiarly his own of reproducing every-day language with just enough additional sparkle or humour or pathos of his own to make it piquant and entertaining without losing *vraisemblance*. His handling of his subject, his execution, are so skilful and masterly, that they for ever hold

the attention alive. He takes a commonplace and makes a novelty of it, as a potter makes a jug out of a lump of clay by turning it round in his hands ; he tells you page after page of ordinary incident with the freshness of a perennial spring. He is master of the dramatic method which has of late preponderated so much over the narrative. Perhaps the greatest attraction of his writings consists in the wonderful appropriateness of the language and sentiments he puts into the mouths of his various characters ; and he not only makes them express themselves, but he manages, without any loss of dramatic propriety, to heighten the tone so as to give some charm or other to what every one says ; and not only this, but with an ease which veils consummate dexterity, he makes these dramatic speeches carry on the action and even convey the author's private innuendo. He has no scruple about this. He alters a woman's thought just enough to make it the vehicle for a sarcasm of his own.

" On this the two ladies went through the osculatory ceremony which they were in the habit of performing, and Mrs. Pendennis got a great secret comfort from the little quarrel, for Laura's confession seemed to say : ' That girl can never be a wife for Pen, for she is light-minded and heartless, and quite unworthy of *our noble hero*. He will be sure to find out her unworthiness for his own part, and then he will be saved from this flighty creature and awake out of his delusion.' "

If the power of producing the impression of reality were the test of the highest creative power, Thackeray would perhaps rank higher than any one who has ever lived,—higher than Defoe. But Thackeray's mode of creating an impression of reality is more complicated than Defoe's. It is not that simple act of force by which the latter identifies himself with his hero. It arises in great measure from his way of knitting his narrative on at every point to some link of our every-day experience. His fiction is like a net, every mesh of which has a connecting knot with actual life. Many novelists have a world of their own

which they inhabit. Thackeray thrusts his characters in among the moving every-day world in which we live. We don't say they are life-like characters ; they are mere people. We feel them to be near us, and that we may meet them any day. Dickens creates a race of beings united to us by common sympathies and affections, endeared to us by certain qualities, and infinitely amusing in their eccentricities. Still, we all know perfectly well they are not really human beings ; though they are enough so for his purpose and ours. No one supposes that Carker ever really rode on that bay horse of his to the city with those shining teeth ; that 'Traddles' hair really had power to force open a pocket-book. We know that the trial of Bardell *v.* Pickwick is an imaginary contribution to our judicial records, and that Edith Dombey exists only in highflown language and the exigencies of melodrama. But the Major frequents Bond Street, Mrs. Hobson Newcome's virtue is a thing of this life and of London, and it is but one step from questioning the existence of Becky's finished little house in Curzon Street to admitting the philosophy of Berkeley. All artists have an ultimate aim which shapes their working. Miss Brontë wishes to depict marked character ; Dickens bends himself to elicit the humorous element in things ; Bulwer supposes that he has a philosophy to develop ; Disraeli sets himself to be himself admired. Thackeray only desires to be a mirror, to give a true but a brilliant reflection ; his vision is warped, no doubt, by peculiarities of his own, but his aim is to reproduce the world as he sees it.

His conception of a story is, like his conception of a character, incomplete. There is no reason why he should begin where he does, no reason why he should end at all. He cuts a square out of life, just as much as he wants, and sends it to Bradbury and Evans. In *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* the characters are at large, and might at any moment be gathered in to a conclusion. The *Newcomes* begins with the history of Clive's grandfather, and

the reasons are independent of art which cause it to conclude before the death of his grandchildren. This, however, is little more than a technical shortcoming, and in all that belongs to execution he shows a mastery that almost makes us think he has some secret peculiar power, so effortless is his brilliancy, so easy his touch. His tale is like a landscape growing under the instinctive rather than conscious hand of a master.

The novelist who draws the external life of men is subject to this disadvantage: he is more dependent on his experience than the one who makes individual character his end. It is true, we apprehend, that a poet can, by the force of imagination, and the excitement of particular parts of his nature so as to produce temporary identification, create a character which he has never seen. Goethe bears witness to the fact in his own case. He tells us he drew in his youth characters of which he had no experience, and the truthfulness of which was justified by his mature observation. His evidence is peculiarly valuable, both because no man estimated observation more highly, and because his great skill in it would enable him to apply an adequate test to the accuracy of the delineations which he speaks of as springing ready-formed from the resources of his own nature. Of course, even granting that a man could be entirely independent of observation in his conception of a character, he would still require it in order to find a field for the display of that conception; and the more knowledge he commands, the better can he develop his idea. Less, however, will suffice for such an artist than for one who works like Thackeray or Fielding. These are absolutely bounded by the limits of their observation, and consequently in constant danger of self-repetition. Mr. Thackeray is remarkable rather for his exhaustless ingenuity in making the most of the knowledge he possesses than for any very wide range. His fertility becomes the more remarkable when we survey the resources on which he draws. His field is not an

extensive one. He stands on the debateable land between the aristocracy and the middle classes—that is his favourite position—and he has evidently observed this form of life mainly from dining-rooms and drawing-rooms. He surveys mankind from the club-room and from country-houses ; he has seen soldiers chiefly at mess-dinners ; is not familiar with lawyers, though he is with the Temple ; has seen a good deal of a painter's life, and must of course have had a considerable knowledge of the professional world of letters, though he is shy of profiting by this experience. He is not at home in provincial life in England, especially town-life, nor has he any extensive acquaintance with the feelings and habits of the lower classes. His knowledge of men about town is profound, exhaustive ; his acquaintance among footmen vast. He may have more materials in store ; but he begins to indicate a check in the extent of his resources. We know the *carte du pays* pretty well now, and have a notion where the boundary fence runs. The extraordinary thing is the immense variety of the surface within it.

There is one direction, however, in which Mr. Thackeray's resources have always been remarkably limited. It is curious how independent he is of thought ; how he manages to exist so entirely on the surface of things. Perhaps he is the better observer of manners because he never cares to penetrate below them. He never refers to a principle, or elucidates a rule of action. There is a total absence in his books of what we usually call ideas. In this respect Thackeray is as inferior to Fielding, as in some others we cannot help thinking him superior. Fielding, you cannot help seeing as you read, was a reflecting man ; you feel that his writings are backed by a body of thought, though it is far from an intrusive element in them. De Foe always leaves the impression of an active, vigorous intellect. The force of Thackeray's writings is derived from the strength of his feelings ; great genius he has, and general vigour of mind, but not the *intellectus cogitabundus*. Read his

charming and eloquent Lectures on the Humorists.* You would suppose that thought would ooze out there if any where ; but there is no trace of it. He simply states his impressions about the men ; and when he speaks of their personal characters, every deference is to be paid to the conception of one who has so sensitive an apprehension of the distinguishing traits of various natures. We are far from wishing for a change in the method of the book ; we believe the sort of quiet meditative way in which Mr.

* In a review of Mr. Thackeray's *Humorists*, contributed by Mr. Roscoe at the time of its appearance to a weekly journal (*The Inquirer*), he thus speaks of the light thrown by that work on the writer's genius : "One may read the biographer himself through the book from cover to cover ; the terrified, yet fascinated gaze he fixes upon Swift ; his painful effort to do his duty by Addison, at whom he makes a desperate leap of praise, and, as many will think, 'falls on the other side ;' his real sympathy with, his affection, his shadowing love for graceless Dick Steele ; his puzzled, wavering estimate of Pope ; his enjoyment in Smollett, joined to his guarded way of speaking of him, as if he were a little cowed by his great patron, the public ; the *beau ideal* he makes of Fielding ; his hatred and contempt for Sterne, all the greater because he is conscious of a concealed thread of this same sentimentality running through his own nature ; his undisguised extenuation of Goldsmith's foibles, and genuine, friendly, happy fellow-feeling in his joys and his genius ; his tender, too kind veil for the vices of sensual impulse ; his eager greeting for what is bold and manly ; his love and reverence for women, joined to so remarkable a want of real appreciation of them ; the too willing hand with which he strikes in their hidden windings, and drags from their concealment the saddest and the meanest self-deceptions of our nature ; the zest with which he tears from our meaner motives their softening contact with, or even their manifest subordination to, higher springs of action, and insists on hanging them up unsheltered in open day ; his angry blows at false assumption ; his forward face of humour and his keen backstroke into the everyday world about him ; the ill enforcement of the reticence he admires and proposes to himself in matters of feeling ; and those hands stretched so plaintively to Heaven, and seeming to seek indulgence rather than mercy,—these give an insight into a man if ever we can hope to obtain one."

Thackeray touches and feels about and probes these men is more valuable and instructive than any elaborate reasonings on them would be, and infinitely better calculated to convey just impressions of what they really were like. But the omission of thought is not the less a characteristic feature ; and on one of the pages, where a note of Coleridge is appended to Thackeray's estimate of Sterne, it is curious to see two such utterly opposite modes of approaching a subject brought into juxtaposition. Thackeray never reasons, he never gains one step by deduction ; he relies on his instincts, he appeals to the witness within us ; he makes his statement, and leaves it to find its own way to the conviction of his readers ; either it approves itself to you, and you accept it ; or it does not, and you leave it. The highest moral truths have been thus enunciated, perhaps can only be thus enunciated ; but Mr. Thackeray does not enunciate great truths. The most he does is to generalise on his social observation. He is not absolutely destitute of some of those distilled results of a wide knowledge of men which properly come under the head of wisdom ; but they are very disproportioned to the extent and penetration of his perception. He occupies a good deal of space in half-meditative, half-emotional harangues on the phenomena of life. Where these do not immediately deal with the affections, they owe their novelty and value to their form alone ; and it would not be difficult to enumerate his chief ideas, and count how often they occur. He impresses on us very constantly that "the Peerage" is the upas-book of English society ; that our servants sit in judgment on us below stairs ; that good wages make a better nurse than love ; that bankers marry earls' daughters, and *vice versâ* ; that the pangs of disappointed passion stop short of death ; that no man making a schedule of his debts ever included them all. We need not go through the list ; and trite as such sayings seem when stripped bare for enumeration, the author for ever invests them with some fresh charm

of expression or illustration, which goes far to preserve them from becoming wearisome. It is with the feelings and the affections that Mr. Thackeray is at home. They supply with him the place of reasoning power. Hence he penetrates deeper into the characters of women than of men. He has never drawn, nor can he ever draw, a man of strong convictions or thoughtful mind ; and even in women he deals almost exclusively with the instinctive and emotional side of their nature. This feature gives a certain thinness and superficiality to Mr. Thackeray's works. He nowhere leaves the mark of a thinker. Even his insight is keen and delicate rather than profound. But his deep and tender feeling makes him sensitive to those suggestions which occupy the boundary land between the affections and the intellect, the country of vain regrets and tender memories, of chastened hopes and softened sadness, the harvest-field in every human soul of love and death. The voice of Mr. Thackeray's tenderness is at once sweet and manly ; and when he will allow us to feel sure he is not sneering at himself, its tone is not unworthy to speak to the most sacred recesses of the heart. Is there in the range of fiction any thing more touching than the conception which took the shattered heart of the old Colonel to rest among the pensioners of Grey Friars ?

Mr. Thackeray's pathos is good ; but his humour is better, more original, more searching. He never rests in the simply ludicrous or absurd. Irony is the essence of his wit. His books are one strain of it. He plays with his own characters. In the simplest things they say the author himself gets a quiet backstroke at them. It is not enough for him to depict a man ridiculous, he makes him himself expose his own absurdities, and gathers a zest from the unconsciousness with which he does so. He treats his *dramatis personæ* as if he were playing off real men. His wit is not a plaything, but a weapon, and must cut something wherever it falls ; it may be a good-

natured blow, but it must touch some one. He never fences against the wall. His satire is most bitter when he is most cool. He is skilful in the management of sneer and innuendo, and can strike a heavy blow with a light weapon. For his broadest absurdities he chooses the form of burlesque, and then he likes to have a definite something to parody. He is one who does not laugh at his own story. It is not often he makes his reader laugh ; but he can do it if he will. Foker is the best of his more laughable creations. In general he is grave, composed, even sad, but he is never uninterested in the personal adventures he is engaged in narrating ; his sympathies are always keenly alive, though often he prefers to conceal how they are enlisted. At bottom he has a warm, almost a passionate interest in his own creations. They are realities to him as to the rest of the world.

His peculiar powers must tempt him to personality, but in any open form of it he does not now indulge. The early days of *Blackwood* and *Fraser* are gone by. There was a time, however, when he gave "Sawedwadgeorge-earllittbulwig" a very severe, though not ungenerous shaking ; and when himself attacked by the *Times* he turned and bit fiercely and sharply. He is apt to wear the forms of his wit to tatters. Jeames, with his peculiar dialect, in the *Yellowplush Papers* and elsewhere, was entertaining and instructive, but has been allowed to grow wearisome. Orthographical absurdity is an exhaustible subject of merriment, and Mr. Thackeray's wit is somewhat too much dependent on his nice appreciation of distinctions of pronunciation, and the slavish subserviency he compels from the art of spelling. He can mimic in print as well or better than Dickens. His sense of humour differs from that of the latter, however, in being almost exclusively called forth by the peculiarities of persons themselves or personal relations. He very rarely is struck with the ludicrous in things alone, as Dickens often is ; his description of Costigan's hairbrush, as "a wonderful

and ancient piece," stands almost by itself; he rarely even makes fun out of a man's personal appearance, except so far as his dress or air indicate some mental trait or characteristic. The mode of his caricaturing, too, is quite different. Dickens collects all the absurdities and laughter-moving elements in a thing, and heaps them together in a new image of his own. Thackeray pictures the thing as it is, only bringing out its ludicrous or contemptible features into sharp relief.

His genius does not lead him to the poetic form; he has just that command of verse which one would expect from a man of his great ability; he can make an able use of it, and his power of language gives him great command of rhyme and sufficient facility. His verses are generally reproductions; free renderings from another language with new point and application, parodies or humorous narratives of actual incident. Among these the "Chronicle of the Drum" is the best. It is thoroughly French, dramatic, and spirit-stirring. "Jacob Homnium's Hoss" far surpasses all his other humorous efforts in verse. He gives us in such pieces far more condensed wit than in his prose works; for he is too good an artist to let it stand in lumps,—he uses it as the gilding of his whole narrative.

His sense of beauty is warm and lively. If he had as much of the negative sense of good taste which discards the ugly and jarring elements as he has of the positive sense which detects and appreciates the beautiful, his works would be far pleasanter reading. He sees beauty every where; his love of it mingles with the affectionateness of his nature, and throws a softening grace over his pages, relieving a bitterness which without it would sometimes be scarcely sufferable. Though his genius leads him to deal with men, external nature has no light charms for him. He does not often paint landscape, but he can do so in brief exquisite touches. Most of us are familiar with some such a German scene as this:

“Pleasant Rhine gardens! Fair scenes of peace and sunshine; noble purple mountains, whose crests are reflected in the magnificent stream: who has ever seen you that has not a grateful memory of those scenes of friendly repose and beauty? To lay down the pen, and even to think of that beautiful Rhineland, makes one happy. At this time of summer-evening the cows are trooping down from the hills, lowing, and with their bells tinkling, to the old town, with its old moats, and gates, and spires, and chestnut-trees, with long blue shadows stretching over the grass; the sky and the river below flame in crimson and gold; and the moon is already out, looking pale towards the sunset. The sun sinks behind the great castle-crested mountains; the night falls suddenly; the river grows darker and darker; lights quiver in it from the windows in the old ramparts, and twinkle peacefully in the villages under the hills on the opposite shore.”

Of his bad taste his works furnish only too abundant evidence. It was a happy idea to look at society from the footman's point of view; but a very little of that sort of fun suffices. And Mr. Thackeray does not scruple to surfeit us. We have rough Warrington's excellent authority for the assertion, that “Mrs. Flanagan the laundress, and Betty the housemaid, are not the company a gentleman should choose for permanent association;” and we are not surprised at that “most igstrorinary” burst of indignation with which Jeames's career draws to its close in the *Yellowplush Papers*.

The advantage of using such a mouthpiece, if it be an advantage, is this, that it gives an opportunity of saying things more vulgar, biting, and personal, than a man's self-respect or shame would allow him to say out of his own mouth. It is a *quasi* shifting of the responsibility. But if we give Sheridan credit for his wit, we must give Thackeray credit for his vulgarity. This feature greatly disfigures his works, and shows itself not only in the gusto and ease with which he enters into the soul of a footman, but in a love of searching out and bringing into prominent view the more petty and ignoble sides of all things. We don't quarrel with a humorist for exposing the vulgar

element in a vulgar man, and in taking all the fun he can out of it. Self-delineative dramatic vulgarity, used in moderation, is one of the fairest and readiest sources of laughter. What we quarrel with is vulgarity in the tone of the work; a charge for which it is not very easy to cite chapter and verse, as it is a thing which is felt by the instinct rather than detected by observation; but we will adduce one instance of the sort of thing we allude to. In the first volume of the *Newcomes* we are told how Warrington and Pendennis gave a little entertainment at the Temple, including among their guests little Rosey and her mother. It is a very pleasant charming picture, and the narrator speaks of the "merry songs and kind faces," the "happy old dingy chambers illuminated by youthful sunshine." What unhappy prompting, then, makes him drop this blot on his description: "I may say, without false modesty, that our little entertainment was most successful. The champagne was iced to a nicety. The ladies did not perceive *that our laundress, Mrs. Flanagan, was intoxicated very early in the afternoon.*" And before the end of the description we are not spared another allusion to "Mrs. Flanagan in a state of excitement." It is vulgar, surely, to mar the pure and pleasant impression of the scene with this image of the drunken laundress not only introduced, but insisted on.

Not from false taste, but from something deeper,—a warp in the very substance of his genius,—arises another unwelcome characteristic. *Vanity Fair* is the name, not of one, but of all Mr. Thackeray's books. The disappointment that waits upon human desires, whether in their fulfilment or their destruction, the emptiness of worldly things, the frailty of the affections, the sternness of fate, the hopelessness of endeavour, *vanitas vanitatum*,—these are his themes. The impression left by his books is that of weariness; the stimulants uphold you while you read; and then comes just such a reaction as if you had really mingled closely in the great world with no hopes

or ambitions outside it; you feel the dust in your throat, the din and the babbling echo in your ears. Art may touch the deepest sources of passion: awe and grief and almost terror are as much within her province as laughter and calm; she may shake the heart, and leave it quivering with emotions whose intensity partakes of pain; but to make it unsatisfied, restless, anxious,—this is not her province. To steep it in the turmoil, the harass, the perpetual shortcomings of actual life, may possibly be sometimes permissible. But this must only be for a brief period—it is a very exceptional source of excitement; and to drop the curtain and leave the mind jaded with small discontents, perplexed with unsolved difficulties, and saddened with the shortcomings of fruition,—this is to be false to the high and soothing influences of Art, and to misuse the power she gives. Those old story-books show a deeper sense of her true province who marry a couple and tell us they lived happily till they died, than Mr. Thackeray, who cannot forbear from turning over one more page to show us the long-beloved and hardly-won Amelia scarcely sufficing to her husband, and who brings back the noble-hearted Laura to teach us that she cannot escape the consequences to her own demeanour and character of having married a man so far inferior to herself.

As a Moralist, Mr. Thackeray's philosophy might be called a religious stoicism rooted in fatalism. The stoicism is patient and manly, kindly though melancholy. It is not a hardened endurance of adverse fate, so much as an unexamining inactive submission to the divine will. This temper pervades his writings, and he has sung its gentler mood in a sweet autumnal, not hopeless exactly, but hope-ignoring, strain:

“We bow to Heaven, that will'd it so,
That darkly rules the fate of all;
That sends the respite or the blow,
That's free to give, or to recall.

This crowns his feast with wine and wit:
Who brought him to that mirth and state?
His betters, see, below him sit,
Or hunger hopeless at the gate.
Who bade the mud from Dives' wheel
To spurn the rags of Lazarus?
Come, brother, in that dust we'll kneel,
Confessing Heaven that ruled it thus.

So each shall mourn, in life's advance,
Dear hopes, dear friends, untimely kill'd;
Shall grieve for many a forfeit chance,
And longing passion unfulfilled.
Amen! whatever fate be sent,
Pray God the heart may kindly glow,
Although the head with cares be bent,
And whitened with the winter snow.

Come wealth or want, come good or ill,
Let young and old accept their part,
And bow before the Awful Will;
And bear it with an honest heart,
Who misses, or who wins the prize.
Go, lose or conquer as you can;
But if you fail, or if you rise,
Be each, pray God, a gentleman."

His fatalism is connected with a strong sense of the powerlessness of the human will. He is a profound sceptic. Not a sceptic in religious conviction, or one who ignores devotional feeling,—far from it; but a sceptic of principles, of human will, of the power in man to ascertain his duties or direct his aims. He believes in God *out of the world*. He loves to represent man as tossing on the wild sea, driven to and fro by wind and waves, landing now on some shining fortunate isle, where the affections find happy rest, and now driven forth again into the night and storm; consoled and strengthened now and then by the bright gleams above him; dexterous with his helm to avoid or conquer the adverse elements; but destitute of all knowledge of navigation, and with no port to steer for and no compass to guide his course. Pleasure, he tells you, may and perhaps should be plucked while

you are young ; but he warns you that the zest will fail ; he warns you that gratified ambition will taste like ashes in the mouth, that fame is a delusion, that the affections, the sole good of life, are often helpless under the foot of adverse fortune, and neither so powerful nor so permanent as we dream ; and he can only recommend you to enjoy honestly, to suffer bravely, and to wear a patient face. He speaks to you as one fellow-subject to another of the Prince of this world. He has no call to set things right, no prompting to examine into the remedy. His vocation is to show the time as it is, and especially where it is out of joint. His philosophy is to accept men and things as they are.

He is a very remarkable instance of the mode in which the force of the intellect affects the moral nature and convictions. We apprehend he never asked "why?" in his life, except perhaps to prove to another that he had no because. With a very strong sense of the obligation of moral truthfulness, and the profoundest respect for, and sympathy with, simplicity and straightforwardness of character, he has no interest in intellectual conclusions. He would never have felt sufficient interest to ask with Pilate, "What is truth?" Always occupied with moral symptoms, intently observing men, and deeply interested in their various modes of meeting the perplexities of life, he never attempts to decide a moral question. He rarely discusses one at all ; and when he does so, he is studiously careful to avoid throwing his weight into either scale. Elsewhere ready enough to show in his proper person, he here shrinks anxiously out of sight. Sometimes he warns you expressly he will not be responsible for what he is putting into the mouth of one of his characters ; or more often he treats the subject like a shuttlecock, raps it to and fro between two dramatic disputants, and lets it fall in the middle for those to pick up who list.

From this form of mind springs, in great measure,

that scepticism to which we have alluded. A writer can scarcely help being sceptical who sees all sides of a question, but has gathered no principles to help him to choose among them; who has no guiding rules to which to refer, and whose instincts alone prevent the field of his conscience from being an absolute chaos. Only by these instincts he tests the characters of men and the propriety of actions; and wherever they alone can serve as guides, they do so faithfully, for in him they are honest and noble.

The best possible exposition of this turn of mind is that which Mr. Thackeray has put into the mouth of Pendennis; and if, in spite of the *quasi*-disclaimer of it, we take it as a more or less fair expression of the author's own spirit, it is because it accords closely with other marks of it scattered throughout his works.

“‘A little while since, young one,’ Warrington said, who had been listening to his friend's confessions neither without sympathy nor scorn, for his mood led him to indulge in both, ‘you asked me why I remained out of the strife of the world, and looked on at the great labour of my neighbour without taking any part in the struggle. Why, what a mere diletante you own yourself to be, in this confession of general scepticism, and what a listless spectator yourself! You are six-and-twenty years old, and as *blasé* as a rake of sixty. You neither hope much, nor care much, nor believe much. You doubt about other men as much as about yourself. Were it made of such *pococuranti* as you, the world would be intolerable; and I had rather live in a wilderness of monkeys, and listen to their chatter, than in a company of men who denied every thing.’

‘Were the world composed of Saint Bernards or Saint Dominics, it would be equally odious,’ said Pen; ‘and at the end of a few score years would cease to exist altogether. Would you have every man with his head shaved, and every woman in a cloister,—carrying out to the full the ascetic principle? Would you have conventicle-hymns twanging from every lane in every city in the world? Would you have all the birds of the forest sing one note and fly with one feather? You call me a sceptic because I acknowledge what *is*; and

in acknowledging that, be it linnet or lark, or priest or parson ; be it, I mean, any single one of the infinite varieties of the creatures of God (whose very name I would be understood to pronounce with reverence, and never to approach but with distant awe), I say that the study and acknowledgment of that variety amongst men especially increases our respect and wonder for the Creator, Commander, and Ordainer of all these minds, so different and yet so united,—meeting in a common adoration, and offering up, each according to his degree and means of approaching the Divine centre, his acknowledgment of praise and worship, each singing (to recur to the bird-simile) his natural song.’

‘And so, Arthur, the hymn of a saint, or the ode of a poet, or the chant of a Newgate thief, are all pretty much the same in your philosophy,’ said George.

‘Even that sneer could be answered were it to the point,’ Pendennis replied ; ‘but it is not ; and it could be replied to you, that even to the wretched outcry of the thief on the tree, the wisest and the best of all teachers we know of, the untiring Comforter and Consoler, promised a pitiful hearing and a certain hope. Hymns of saints ! Odes of poets ! who are we to measure the chances and opportunities, the means of doing, or even judging, right and wrong, awarded to men ; and to establish the rule for meting out their punishments and rewards ? We are as insolent and unthinking in judging of men’s morals as of their intellects. We admire this man as being a great philosopher, and set down the other as a dullard, not knowing either, or the amount of truth in either, or being certain of the truth any where. We sing *Te Deum* for this hero who has won a battle, and *De profundis* for that other one who has broken out of prison, and has been caught afterwards by the policemen. Our measure of rewards and punishments is most partial and incomplete, absurdly inadequate, utterly worldly ; and we wish to continue it into the next world. Into that next and awful world we strive to pursue men, and send after them our important party verdicts of condemnation or acquittal. We set up our paltry little rods to measure Heaven immeasurable, as if, in comparison to that, Newton’s mind, or Pascal’s, or Shakspeare’s, was any loftier than mine ; as if the ray which travels from the sun would reach me sooner than the man who blacks my boots. Measured by that altitude, the tallest and the smallest among us are so alike diminutive and pitifully base, that I say we should take no count of the calculation, and it is a meanness to reckon the difference.’

In these speculations and confessions of Arthur, the reader may perhaps see allusions to questions which, no doubt, have occupied and discomposed himself, and which he may have answered by very different solutions to those come to by our friend. We are not pledging ourselves for the correctness of his opinions, which readers will please to consider are delivered dramatically, the writer being no more answerable for them than for the sentiments uttered by any other character of the story: our endeavour is merely to follow out, in its progress, the development of the mind of a worldly and selfish, but not ungenerous or unkind or truth-avoiding man. And it will be seen that the lamentable stage to which his logic at present has brought him, is one of general scepticism and sneering acquiescence in the world as it is; or if you like so to call it, a belief qualified with scorn in all things extant. If, seeing and acknowledging the lies of the world, Arthur, as see them you can with only too fatal a clearness, you submit to them without any protest farther than a laugh: if, plunged yourself in easy sensuality, you allow the whole wretched world to pass groaning by you unmoved: if the fight for the truth is taking place, and all men of honour are on the ground armed on the one side or the other, and you alone are to lie on your balcony and smoke your pipe out of the noise and the danger,—you had better have died, or never have been at all, than such a sensual coward.

‘The truth, friend!’ Arthur said, imperturbably; ‘where is the truth? Show it me. That is the question between us. I see it on both sides. I see it in the Conservative side of the house, and amongst the Radicals, and even on the Ministerial benches. I see it in this man who worships by act of parliament, and is rewarded with a silk apron and five thousand a year; in that man, who, driven fatally by the remorseless logic of his creed, gives up every thing, friends, fame, dearest ties, closest vanities, the respect of an army of churchmen, the recognised position of a leader, and passes over, truth-impelled, to the enemy, in whose ranks he is ready to serve henceforth as a nameless private soldier:—I see the truth in that man, as I do in his brother, whose logic drives him to quite a different conclusion, and who, after having passed a life in vain endeavours to reconcile an irreconcilable book, flings it at last down in despair, and declares, with tearful eyes, and hands up to heaven, his revolt and recantation.’”

On which side is the author? On neither, or rather

on both. He thinks Arthur very wrong, and is not sure he has not the best of the argument. *Pendennis* is throughout the least agreeable of Mr. Thackeray's fictions. A work more purposeless, or one in which all grounds of action and elements of judgment are more distorted and confused, it is scarcely possible to imagine. Arthur Pendennis is represented as a young man of warm impetuous feelings, a lively intellect, much self-conceit, and a natural selfishness of disposition fostered by early indulgence. The highest and sole attractive points in his character are a sense of honour and a capacity for love. In early youth he is carried away by an impetuous passion for an uneducated woman, whose beauty is her sole attraction. Forcibly weaned from his first devotion, he goes to college, where his sole ambition is for social display, and where he falls a victim to his vanity and weakness. Returning home, he idles away some time, entangling himself more or less with a clever wicked little flirt in the neighbourhood. He goes to London, takes to review-writing as a means of support, strives to write honestly; has written a novel, dresses it up for the public, publishes it, and gains a reputation by it; moves meanwhile, by the interest of his uncle—a thorough man of the world and of the clubs—among high circles of fashionable life, and loves to study them and all other forms of life; lives in every way—in earning his maintenance, in intellect, in emotion—from hand to mouth; has no ambition, no convictions, and is utterly destitute of any object in life and of any incitement to action beyond the temporary requisitions or the chance stimulants of the day. And thus Mr. Thackeray moralises on his life:

“Was Pendennis becoming worldly, or only seeing the world, or both? and is a man very wrong for being after all only a man? Which is the most reasonable, and does his duty best: he who stands aloof from the struggle of life, calmly contemplating it, or he who descends to the ground, and takes his part in the contest? ‘That philosopher,’ Pen said, ‘had held a great place amongst the leaders of the world, and en-

joyed to the full what it had to give of rank and riches, renown and pleasure, who came, weary-hearted, out of it, and said that all was vanity and vexation of spirit. Many a teacher of those whom we reverence, and who steps out of his carriage up to his carved cathedral place, shakes his lawn ruffles over the velvet cushion, and cries out, that the whole struggle is an accursed one, and the works of the world are evil. Many a conscience-stricken mystic flies from it altogether, and shuts himself out from it within convent-walls (real or spiritual), whence he can only look up to the sky, and contemplate the heaven out of which there is no rest and no good.

‘But the earth, where our feet are, is the work of the same Power as the immeasurable blue yonder, in which the future lies into which we would peer. Who ordered toil as the condition of life, ordered weariness, ordered sickness, ordered poverty, failure, success—to this man a foremost place, to the other a nameless struggle with the crowd—to that a shameful fall, or paralysed limb, or sudden accident—to each some work upon the ground he stands on, until he is laid beneath it.’ While they were talking, the dawn came shining through the windows of the room, and Pen threw them open to receive the fresh morning-air. ‘Look, George,’ said he; ‘look and see the sun rise: he sees the labourer on his way a-field; the work-girl plying her poor needle; the lawyer at his desk, perhaps; the beauty smiling asleep upon her pillow of down; or the jaded reveller reeling to bed; or the fevered patient tossing on it; or the doctor watching by it, over the throes of the mother for the child that is to be born into the world:—to be born and to take his part in the suffering and struggling, the tears and laughter, the crime, remorse, love, folly, sorrow, rest.’ ”

Pendennis was decidedly becoming worldly, and was very far from being what every man ought to be, and what most men, let us hope, are in at least some higher degree than he was. But Mr. Thackeray must not argue as if we were in danger of charging him with worldliness because he went down into the battle of life and accepted his place among those conditions which the divine wisdom has appointed for the activity of man. It is not this that makes him worldly, but because he has no life and no interests above this struggle to ennoble and give a meaning to it. Because he floats down the stream aimless, and

with no thought beyond the momentary excitements of the rapid course. Because he is utterly immersed in worldly interests and worldly enjoyments; because his ends, as far as he can be said to have any, as well as his activity, are worldly. This is why we condemn Pendennis. Following this life, he comes accidentally across a charming little porter's daughter, who falls violently in love with him, and for whom he conceives a sudden passion. Not the man to marry thus, he rises superior to trifling with a temptation, and shows resolution and, what he is never indicated as wanting, generous and honourable impulse. Subsequently he consents to marry his old flirting little friend, for whom he has no love (as he honestly tells her), because she brings him wealth and a seat in Parliament. He finds that so dishonourable a condition is annexed to the acceptance of these advantages that he is bound to refuse them; but in doing so he will not break the engagement of honour which binds him to Blanche Amory, although he has discovered that the true leaning of his heart is towards Laura, his mother's ward, who has loved him from old times. The faithlessness of his *fiancée* rescues him, and allows him to marry her whom he really prefers. He does so, and the spirit of his life remains that which was before indicated. He continues a kind-hearted, conceited, clever, self-centered, sceptical man of this world purely. The history concludes with a few sentences, in which the author briefly vindicates it as being a picture in conformity with the actual arrangements of divine providence; and invites us, "knowing how mean the best of us is," to "give a hand of charity to Arthur Pendennis, with all his faults and shortcomings, who does not claim to be a hero, but only a man and a brother." We must be allowed to observe in passing, that though we dare not refuse the hand of charity to Mr. Pendennis, it costs a struggle to give it; and that any thing further, such as affection or respect, we are quite unable to feel. We have no wish to be intimate with him. We find him

intensely disagreeable, ill-bred, and ostentatiously offensive. But this is purely a personal matter, and may be referred partly to envy of his superior talents, partly to disgust at his inordinate self-conceit. What we have to do with is the moral view taken by the author. It is characteristic that, while professing to lay bare the weaknesses and shortcomings of Pendennis's worldly life, he does not once touch the root of the matter, or indicate the true want of this wasted spirit. To a mind like Arthur's, which measures the emptiness of all worldly subjects of ambition, it is more than to any other essential that it should have some gleam of insight and some practical interest in the higher diviner life which embraces this. And Arthur, orthodox, church-going Christian as he no doubt is, is a practical atheist. With a pure and awful reverence for the manifestations of holiness in others, gazing on a woman praying as with the reverted eyes of one justly banished from Paradise, and himself not without pious impulses, he lives without God in the world. And if we were to lay our hand on the most deep-seated failing of Mr. Thackeray's works, we should find it, not in his sneers or in his contemptuous estimate of human nature, but in the low level on which the whole body of his creation stands, and in the narrow boundaries within which the whole is enclosed. We should have no quarrel with an artist who should paint the world as it is, ay, and in far truer colours than Mr. Thackeray dares to use ; but then he must embrace the true scope of life, he must not ignore those higher connections from which alone it acquires a purpose, and reduce it to a medley fit only to move the laughter of fools and the tears and scorn of the wise. It is not enough to gaze on the varied conditions of man, and say, We accept them, they are manifestations of the divine will. One can almost imagine that the faith of an animal rises to this uninformed acceptance of the conditions of existence. To man it is granted to touch here and there the general clue of the

divine purpose, and to hold ever by that thread which belongs to his individual soul ; to him is given a modifying will, a power of choice, and an active energy ; of him that highest of all things has been said, that he may be a fellow-worker with God. Even in the minutiae of his daily life he may follow that service which is perfect freedom, and only not be a servant because he has the higher tenderer invitation to be a child.

Is it answered, that these themes are too serious for the novelist, the entertainer of lighter hours ? Then we say, that as long as a writer confines himself to fragmentary sketches of life, to its superficial humours or sentiments, the answer is good ; and that we have no objection whatever to take the entertainment at its full worth, and laugh gaily with Grimaldi in the pantomime or Mathews in the farce. But Mr. Thackeray never cultivated this sort of literature in spirit, though he may for a time have availed himself of its ordinary forms. His genius is too large, too penetrating, too grave to move in this sphere. He professes to paint human life ; and he who does so, and who does not base his conception on that religious substructure which alone makes it other than shreds of flying dreams, is an incomplete artist and a false moralist. And Mr. Thackeray cannot be sheltered behind the assertion that a fitting reverence precludes the intermingling of religious ideas with light literature,—first, because what we ask for does not demand a constant presence of the religious element on the surface, or indeed that it should appear there at all,—only that the spirit of the work and the picture of life should recognise it as at the foundation, or even only not utterly lose sight of it as a fundamental element in the conception of this world ; and secondly, because he does not scruple (and fitly, we think) reverently to introduce the topic of religion, and to picture a humble spirit looking upwards for consolation and support ;—because, while he includes the *sentiment*, he excludes the *realities* of religion, and has no

place for those aspirations of the higher life, only to form the field for which was this world he deals with created.

And this further quarrel we have with Mr. Thackeray's picture—that he gives a worldly view of the world ; that through sarcasm and satire there shines every where a real undue appreciation of worldly things—most, of those things which he is most bitter against—money and rank ; and above all, a debasing sensitiveness to the opinion of those around us, apart from any regard for them and independently of any respect for their judgment. He reads as if he had a consciousness in himself of too great an appreciation of these things, against which his moral indignation is always in arms, and to which his honesty compels him to give expression ; as if the bitterness of his jests were founded on that temper the poet speaks of—

“ Out of that mood was born
Self-scorn, and then laughter at that self-scorn.”

Otherwise, by what strange distortion can a man of Mr. Thackeray's mind and heart have allowed himself to become absorbed in the contemplation of meanness and false shame, and the world's low worship of mere worldly advantages ? How can he have permitted so unpleasant a subject to grow on him till it has become the atmosphere of his thoughts ? As Swift rakes in dirt, so Thackeray in meanness. He loves to anatomise its every form, to waylay and detect it at every corner, to turn it inside out, to descant on it, to conjugate it. He sees English society worshipping a golden and titled calf, and he angrily dashes down the image ; but that is not enough ; he grinds it to powder, and mingles it in every draught he gives us. We know there are these things in the world ; but the question is, whether an author is well employed in constantly forcing them on our attention. All will agree that the less a man can be affected by them the better ; we know these meannesses and basenesses

are in our own natures ; but the true way to deal with them is, looking upwards, to tread them under foot, not to go scraping about with our noses to the ground and taking credit for our humility and honesty when we lay them bare. They grow thick enough in our own soil and in our neighbours', if we choose to devote ourselves to the search. Any man will succeed in distorting and confusing his moral judgment, if he will but search long enough among his mixed motives to lay hold of the mean or selfish element, and do but give it attention enough when he has found it. Grant, if you will, that an element of self-interest mingles in all we do ; are we likely to lose it by always looking for it ? Is there any thing less edifying than Mr. Thackeray's way of showing up the meanesses and mixed motives of our neighbours, and then turning sharply on his readers, crying, " You're as bad, I'm as bad, we are none of us better than our neighbours ; allow me to continue to excoriate them " ? The remedy for these failings is not in exposing and railing at them. It is in raising men out of the atmosphere of them. The highest and the surest escape is the same we spoke of before, as transmuting life by a divine alchemy from barrenness, emptiness, and vanity into a harvest-field of rich opportunities and a battle-field for high ambition. Just in the degree in which a man's secret soul is occupied by a life at once within and outside this life, will the small vexations of life and the pettinesses of others and even of himself fail to trouble him ; the more he can absorb himself in a loftier pursuit, the more heedlessly will he brush through the nettles which Mr. Thackeray will have us sit down in to examine.

And apart from these considerations, any vivid interests powerful enough thoroughly to occupy a man suffice to set him free from this morbid and one-sided scrutiny of himself and his neighbours. But Mr. Thackeray not only narrows the field of life—he ignores the main avenues which, within the boundaries of the world he de-

scribes, are available as an escape both from an unhealthy sensitiveness to the meanness around us and within us, and from that burdening ever-presence of self under which almost all his characters labour.

Wide as is his knowledge of men, he seems to have little acquaintance with affairs. He paints men almost entirely in their moments of relaxation. He never describes a man carried out of himself by strong practical aims and interests. He is unwilling to recognise, seems scarcely to believe, that men ever have disinterested motives, or can be deeply occupied by other things than the demands of the feelings or the exigencies of gaining a livelihood. He laughs to scorn the idea that a man in writing, for instance, can have any higher object than to gain a money reward. He will have it that writing is a trade, and that all the writer can aspire to in the way of lofty aims is to write honestly, and without false exaggeration of sentiment or wilful distortion of fact. And on this latter point he speaks strongly and well, and with a vivid consciousness of some of an author's most immediate sources of temptation. It is true, perhaps, that the art of letters has become unduly subservient to money gains, that even men of genius are apt to consider too closely not what their own conception of what is best and highest prompts them to, but what will tell best in securing a popular acceptance; and that they too often wait timidly and obsequiously on the public taste of the day. Yet this spirit is not so universal as Mr. Thackeray would have us think. Letters still leave a man free to be true to himself and his art, as well as to the ordinary exigencies of honesty. Even if they did not, there are plenty of other careers in which a man may forget himself in devotion to something beyond him. And in the case of the painter, indeed, Mr. Thackeray can see that while the artist labours for bread, his very choice of his profession as a means of making bread shows his love for it, and that as he who preaches the Gospel may justly live by it, the

fact that he lives by his art is by no means inconsistent with a conscious devotion to its own high ends, or with his finding in a pure love for it the truest and most powerful source of his activity. There is a charming passage in the *Newcomes* which shows how fully Mr. Thackeray can enter when he chooses into the joys, the consolations, and the absorption of art :

“The painter turned as he spoke ; and the bright northern light which fell upon the sitter’s head was intercepted, and lighted up his own, as he addressed us. Out of that bright light looked his pale thoughtful face and long locks and eager brown eyes. The palette on his arm was a great shield painted of many colours : he carried his maul-stick and a sheaf of brushes along with it, the weapons of his glorious but harmless war. With these he achieves conquests, wherein none are wounded save the envious : with that he shelters him against how much idleness, ambition, temptation ! Occupied over that consoling work, idle thoughts cannot gain the mastery over him ; selfish wishes or desires are kept at bay. Art is truth ; and truth is religion ; and its study and practice a daily work of pious duty. What are the world’s struggles, brawls, successes, to that calm recluse pursuing his calling ? See, twinkling in the darkness round his chamber, numberless beautiful trophies of the graceful victories which he has won, —sweet flowers of fancy reared by him,—kind shapes of beauty which he has devised and moulded. The world enters into the artist’s studio, and scornfully bids him a price for his genius, or makes dull pretence to admire it. What know you of his art ? You cannot read the alphabet of that sacred book, good old Thomas Newcome !”

As a rule, however, the author of *Vanity Fair* never represents a man as taken out of himself, except in some instances by the passions or the affections which approach nearest to instincts. He produces his characters on the stage generally only in their hours of idleness or amusement ; and though he may indicate external occupation, he never (save, perhaps, in the sketch of J. J.) indicates an absorbing external interest. All his characters are self-engrossed, most of them self-seeking. Of Pendennis he tells us openly, “ours, as the reader has possibly al-

ready discovered, is a selfish story, and almost every person, according to his nature more or less generous than George, and according to the way of the world, as it seems to us, is occupied about Number One." The occasion which calls out this expression of conviction indicates the source from which it springs. No man can set too high a value on the affections, but too exclusive a one he easily may; and this, as we have before indicated, is Mr. Thackeray's danger. He sees that the purest passion, the strongest personal friendship, and still more, the holy instinct of maternal love,—which he so admires and reverences that he seems to approach the subject on bended knee,—have mingled in their very essence a tincture of self; and finding it here, it seems easy to him to assume that no province of human life can possibly be free from it. Whereas, in fact, the affections are the strongholds of self-occupancy. Warm feelings, devoted instincts of attachment, are but a blessed gift from heaven, a part of the granted *nature*, and in their action simply the indulgence of a delightful emotion. Through the intellect and the will is a man's escape from self; thought and action are the conditions of self-forgetfulness; and love only loses its element of self in active service for the beloved object. Brooding over an attachment is the gratification of the highest pleasurable instinct granted to man: it is not conscious self-seeking; it is self-gratification: to labour for the sake of love is at once to escape from self, and the reverse of self-seeking. And as the highest virtues have the deepest temptations by their side, perhaps the most devout soul is the most in danger of a subtle spirit of self-occupancy, and most needs a field of active service; and on the other hand, the conditions of life offer the easier escape from self-occupation in proportion as they lie farther from the domain of sentiment—science more than art, and active life more than science; and that pursuit offers the least temptation to selfishness which affords a man the widest and most absorbing sphere of exertion in the interest of

others. Government is the employment which gives a man the least excuse for being self-occupied, though no doubt it may present him with formidable temptations to gratify what selfishness he has. In his want of interest in the active concerns of life, and in his emotional and artistic nature, are probably to be found the grounds of Mr. Thackeray's belief in the universality of self-occupation, which by a want of intellectual discrimination he confounds with self-seeking or selfishness.

Some of Mr. Thackeray's lesser works are pervaded throughout with a genial kindly spirit; such are the *History of Mr. Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hogarty Diamond* (which it is pleasant to hear is a favourite with the author), and *The Kickleburys on the Rhine*, *Dr. Birch's School*, &c. In these, foibles are pleasantly touched with cheerful happy raillery, and a light, gay, yet searching tone of ridicule, and a tender pleasing pathos, pervade the story: "the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself;" the wit plays freshly and brightly, like the sun glittering through the green leaves on the wood-paths. But in the mass of his works the tendencies we have before spoken of give a dark and unpleasing ground to the whole picture; and on it he draws in strong black and white. His general view of English society is a very low and unrelieved one. It is a true but a strictly one-sided representation, selected partly for its amusing elements, partly from an unhappy idiosyncrasy of the author. An opposite picture might be drawn as flattering as this is satirical; and neither, of course, would be complete. On this stage move many figures fair and dark. The author's skill by no means forsakes him when he chooses to draw upon our love and admiration: Dobbin and Amelia, Warrington and Laura, and Helen; Lady Esmond, Colonel Newcome, and the sweet, placid, tear-worn, but somewhat shadowy image of Madame de Florac, rise up at once before the mind. But he puts such characters apart; they shine like glowworms, brightly, but with no

influence in the surrounding darkness. They are in his world, but scarcely of it; they are never allowed to leaven his general conception of society. A lump of sugar here and there cannot soften the bitterness of the whole cake. It would be unjust, perhaps, to say that his genius is more at home in his darker portraitures; but they certainly gain an undue significance, if only from this, that they are always represented in their proper sphere of activity, where their whole cleverness and energy is brought into light; whereas his fairer characters are invariably those whose excellence consists in the goodness of their instincts and emotions, and, with the single exception of Colonel Esmond, no external field of any interest is found for them to occupy. It is unfortunate, too, that Mr. Thackeray finds the main sources of wit and amusement in the most close connection with some form of vice or wickedness. How often is his laughter spun out of baseness, and crime, and misery! Degrading selfishness, heathen worldliness, abandoned honour, broken oaths, dice, drunkenness, every form of viciousness but one are made the subjects of sparkling satire, witty jests, the universal charity of mockery, and scorn tempered by scepticism. The company of bad men and women in the world is not elevating. How can they be elevating made amusing in books? The "terrible death-chant of the contrite chimney-sweep," in which Sam Hall conveys the lesson of his example, enforced by maledictions, has a grim humour about it true enough,—might almost be said to be a work of genius; but we don't take our daughters to hear it sung. Wickedness has its funny side; but it grates on our ears to hear English ladies talking as they do sometimes of "that charming wicked little Becky." We don't say that a vicious or even a degraded nature is not a fit subject for the artist,—no doubt it is; we do not say it is an unfit subject even for comedy; but we do say it ought not to be comically treated. We do maintain that there is a sin against good taste and right moral influence in ming-

ling too intimately real vice and the ridiculous; they may be alternated, but not mixed, still less almost chemically combined, after Mr. Thackeray's fashion. You sap the force of moral resentment when, by smiling raillery or farcical laughter, you make tolerable the stern realities of sin. We know no book with so repulsive a contrast between the broad farce, almost buffoonery, of its form, and the hideous and utterly unrelieved baseness and wickedness of its subject-matter, as is exhibited in the history of "Mr. Deuceace," told in the characteristic orthography of "Jeames." Mr. Thackeray has in his heart an eager hatred of baseness and hypocrisy. It bursts out unmistakably sometimes. It is hidden, no doubt, under all his air of persiflage; but it is part of his art to preserve a mask of neutrality; and an occasional protest has no weight against the tone of universal toleration, and the bantering mood which shakes these glittering sparks of wit out of the devil's devices. Sin is fire; and Mr. Thackeray makes fireworks of it.

And not only the witty emblazonment is bad, the elaborate detail is bad; and this applies not alone to the descriptions of the more serious vices, but to the lesser meannesses which we have before mentioned as occupying so undue a space of Mr. Thackeray's attention. It can be good for none of us to mingle so pleasantly and so closely with old Sir Pitt Crawley, with Becky, with old Osborne, with Major Pendennis, or even his nephew, with Costigan, with Altamont, with Blanche, with Lord Steyne, with many of those snobs. It is bad for us to be constantly rubbed against vice or sin of any kind; and we do not know whether the constant minutiae of selfishness, of weakness, of false ambition, of cringing meanness and vulgarity, are not more harmful than the details of murder and other violent crime. Ainsworth and Thackeray differ in this respect only in the greater refinement and reconditeness of the latter. Why do we condemn the French school of novels? Because of the

danger and debasement which lie in familiarising the ideas they contain. If we rightly think Richardson's *Pamela* unfit reading on account of its prurient minute details of a seduction, may we not protest against some portions of Mr. Thackeray's works which bring us so unintermittingly in contact with other degrading weaknesses of our nature, accompanied by something of a similar zest in the author, which has great power to infect the reader? On Richardson's subject, we should not, in the present day, tolerate such minuteness for an instant; on that matter we have an almost absurd apprehension of the dangers of infection. We not only avoid details, we shun the subject altogether: an author who means to be read must not come within a mile of it,—he must cripple his creations of character and his pictures of life in order to avoid it. Mr. Thackeray is fully aware of this; mere commercial self-preservation makes it necessary to hold aloof. But if the instinct which avoids familiarity with one particular form of vice and sinfulness be true, as we believe it to be, though overstrained, ought not the same instinct to apply in due proportion to other forms of vice and sinfulness?

It is no vindication of the dark tints of Mr. Thackeray's painting to say that base natures and low motives throng life itself, that it is not a Jenny and Jessamy world, and that we must all mix in it. The fact is, that a vast number of Mr. Thackeray's readers learn more of the soiled aspects of the world from his pages than from any experience of their own. And if it be said that these considerations would go too far in curtailing the range of art, we reply, that the author limits its range by the same considerations, but so as to incur a double evil; for while he cuts himself off from almost a whole side of human life in order to accommodate himself to modern taste and female readers, he certainly retains much which any but the world's standard of taste would willingly see excluded. Conventionally he is thoroughly

unexceptionable. Practically his writings are too cramped for the indurated apprehensions of men who know the world ; too tarnished for those who are unsophisticated, whether men, women, or children. A broad and life-like picture of wickedness, even baseness, is not objected to. Iago and Blifil leave no stain on the mind ; but incessant pottering over small meannesses bears the same relation to Shakspeare's and Fielding's treatment of this subject as, in another subject, Paul de Kock's novels do to *Tom Jones*. The most condensed illustration of this morbid tendency is republished from the *Comic Almanac* in the first volume of Mr. Thackeray's *Miscellanies*,—" *The Fatal Boots*." It is the cleverest piece of irony since *Jonathan Wild*, and perhaps the most subtle and complete delineation of an utterly base and selfish nature ever written. It is more painful and humiliating reading than *Jonathan Wild* ; because the greater crimes of the latter remove him further from us, and because he is distinguished by some power of intellect and force of character utterly denied to the abject Stubbs, whose autobiography reads like the smell of bad cabbages.

It is the evil of all satire, that it depends for its force upon a minute and vivid delineation of faults and vices which it is never advantageous to drag into light. Its only useful sphere is personality. It is not often that personal satire is defensible ; but in that, or the near approaches to it, is the only practical and possibly advantageous exercise of the art. You can make one man feel the lash, and direct a storm of indignation against him which may punish him or terrify him into a new course. And so it is possible to attack effectively a small class, or an opinion or course of action, which admits of practical change or abandonment. You may satirise General Simpson or the *Times*, and possibly produce an effect, though it is not probable ; you may satirise the Palace Court, the peace-party, or the conduct of the war, and it may be with a result : but you cannot

scourge abstract vices ; you cannot hope to be practically employed when you satirise hypocrisy, mammon-worship, or false adulation of rank, or the worldly estimate of temporal advantages which results in wretched marriages or selfish singleness. For one who learns from Mr. Thackeray to amend a folly of his own, how many will gain a sharper insight into those of their friends ! And to none of our tendencies does Mr. Thackeray minister so effectively as to this. His social satire is fair and honest, "strikes no foul blow," as he himself says of it ; but it is so searching, so minute, deals with such real incident of every-day occurrence, that it forms a sort of public gossip. It is a treasury of general observation, out of which to make particular applications. It gives us an insight we never had before into the weaknesses of our neighbours, makes us rich in new sources of contempt, and indicates clearly the channels of false shame. We can test our friends' daily life by it, and cry, "Isn't that like Mrs. Kewsy?" and "The very way the Portmans go on."

As a set-off against these unpleasing elements in Mr. Thackeray's writings, there is one whole side of his genius which casts a pure and pleasant sunshine over his pages. He has a heart as deep and kind as ever wrote itself in fiction. His feelings are warm and impetuous, his nature honest, truthful, honourable. Against cruelty, against baseness, against treachery, his indignation flames out quick and sudden, like a scorching fire. With what is manly, frank, and noble, he has a native inborn sympathy. If his sense of the ludicrous, and his wit, are too often nourished upon wickedness and depravity, he is familiar with another and truer connection, and has an exquisite felicity and moving power in the mingling of humour and pathos. If his works as a whole want purpose and depth, and clearness of moral conviction, if they accept sin simply as part of what is, instead of as a departure from what should be, yet they

preach throughout lessons of example more telling than precept, and contain many and many a passage well fitted to stir the spirit and to move the heart. If his wicked and mean creations are too predominant and too detailed, he has some at least whose great goodness and white purity relieve by fair gleams the dark and clouded landscape. They are emotional characters: but are not these the very ones which practically take the strongest hold on our affections; and the errors of impulse those which, however long the preacher may preach, we shall always the most readily excuse? Who ever painted a manly generous boy with so free and loving a pencil as the author of *Dr. Birch's School*, of Champion Major, and of young Clive Newcome? Who else has that fine touch that can picture us so delicately and so clearly the fresh innocence of girlhood, the tender passion of a loving woman, or the absorbing devotion of a mother? Who can trace in firmer strokes fidelity and courage and temperate endurance in a man? In every page, alternating with bitterness, and sometimes an unsparing cruelty of sarcasm, there shines out a kindly affectionate nature, soft compassion, and humble reverence. It is as if Mr. Thackeray's nature, like his writings, were full of strongly-contrasted elements, lying closely side by side. Whatever his defects,—and they are great,—he must always take his stand as one of the masters of English fiction; inferior to Fielding, because he wants his breadth and range, the freeness of his air, and the soundness of his moral healthfulness; but his rival in accuracy of insight and vigour of imagination; and perhaps, as we have before said, more than his rival in fertility. And since Fielding's time, though characters have been drawn more complete than any one of Mr. Thackeray's, no fiction has been written in the school to which his imagination belongs which can bear a moment's comparison with *Vanity Fair*. This is hitherto his masterpiece, and will probably always remain so. There is a *vis* in it

greater than in any of his other works—the lines are more sharply, deeply cut, the whole more marked with the signs of special and peculiar genius. Our pleasure in it alternates vividly with dislike—almost repulsion; but our admiration is compelled by all parts of it, and our eagerest sympathy by some. Dobbin and Amelia will always remain living inmates of the English mind. They have both of them, Amelia especially, had much injustice done them by their author; but as their images lie longer in our breasts, and we meditate upon them, the sneers and innuendoes fade away, and we see them undefaced, and recognise that Dobbin's devotion was not selfishness, and Amelia's characteristic tenderness not weakness. Just as with living people small obscurations and accidents fall away, and we estimate the whole character better in absence, so it is with these: we know them better, and love them more trustfully in memory than on the actual page. Thackeray's genius is in many respects not unlike that of Goethe; and such another woman as Amelia has not been drawn since Margaret in *Faust*.

Of his other great works, *Pendennis* is the richest in character and incident, and the least pleasing; the *Newcomes* the most humane, but less vigorous and concentrated than any of the others; *Esmond*—the later parts at least—by far the best and noblest. We have no temptation to discuss the merits of its imitative style and scenery, observing only that though a modern mind shines through the external coat, yet probably no other man could have gathered so many minute and characteristic indicia of the times of which he writes, and so artfully have blended them together. It is as a tale we look at it; and though to most men such a subject, so treated, would have afforded more than ordinary temptations to an overloading of character with costume and external detail, with Mr. Thackeray the reverse is the case. He is freed from his devotion to the petty satire

of modern conventions, and has fewer calls for the exercise of small contempts. The main characters, Esmond, his Mistress, and Beatrix, are the ablest he has drawn; they are not less vivid than his others, and more complete. Esmond is strong, vigorous, noble, finely executed as well as conceived, and his weakness springs from the strength of a generous and impulsive nature. He is no exception to the observation that Mr. Thackeray never endows a hero with principles of action. Esmond is true to persons, not to ideas of right or duty. His virtue is fidelity, not conscientiousness. Beatrix is perhaps the finest picture of splendid, lustrous, physical beauty ever given to the world. It shines down every woman that poet or painter ever drew. Helen of Greece,

"Fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars,"

is the only one who approaches her. And both her character and that of her mother are masterpieces of poetical insight; the latter blemished, however, here and there with the author's unconquerable hankering to lay his finger on a blot. He must search it out, and give it at least its due blackness. He will not leave you to gather that it must be there,—he parades it to the day, and presses it to your reluctant eyes. It comes partly from the truthfulness of his nature, which cannot bear that a weakness should be concealed, and partly probably from a mistaken apprehension of the truth that the artist must be true to nature. There was a time when a good deal of parade was made and some very diluted philosophy spun out of the distinction between "the true" and "the real." But this simple fact there is, that a man may be true to nature and yet depart from all her manifested forms; and that it is a higher striving to be faithful to such an inborn conception than to mutilate and distort it for the sake of finding room in it for certain observed facts. Mr. Thackeray sometimes does

this, oftener he does what is quite as unpleasing. When in a character, especially a woman's, he comes upon a defect, he does not allow it to speak itself, or show itself naturally, and sink with its own proper significance into the reader's mind. He rushes in as author, seizes on it, and holds it up with sadness or triumph: "See," he says, "this is what you find in the best women." Thus he gives it an undue importance and vividness, and troubles and distorts the true impression of the whole character.

In the same spirit he lays hold of the petty dishonesties and shams of social life. Almost all these have their origin in vanity, and in its hasty and habitual gratification the meanness of the devices is overlooked, at any rate not often wilfully adopted with a consciousness of its presence. Such contrivances are follies of a bad kind; but to stigmatise them as deliberate hypocrisies is to give a very false significance to the worst ingredient in them.

In the *Newcomes* "the elements are kindlier mixed" than in any of the other fictions; there is a great softening of tone; a larger predominance is given to feeling over sarcasm. As before, the book is a transcript from life; but the life is more pleasantly selected, and the baser ingredients not scattered with so lavish a hand. If the execution be somewhat inferior, as perhaps it is, the characters of Clive and Ethel less clearly and vividly defined than we have by long use to high excellence begun to think we have a right to expect they should be, and the former unattractive in his feebleness; if the journey through the story be rather *langweilig*, sometimes from over-detail, sometimes from long and superficial moralisings over the sins of society,—yet there is much to reconcile us to these shortcomings in exchange, in some greater respite from the accustomed sneer. We have said before that the genius of Thackeray has many analogies to that of Goethe. He is like him, not only in

his mode of depicting characters as they live, instead of reproducing their depths and entirety from the conception of a penetrative imagination, but also in his patient and tolerant acceptance of all existing phenomena, and his shrinking not merely from moral judgment but from moral estimate. The avoidance of the former springs in Thackeray from kindly feeling, from the just and humble sense we all should have that our own demerits make it unseemly for us to ascend the judgment-chair, and from a wide appreciation of the variety and obscurity of men's real motives of action; the latter, a very different thing, springs from this same wide insight, which makes the task more than ordinarily difficult,—especially to an intellect not framed to take pleasure in general conclusions,—and from his imagination being one which does not naturally conceive in separate wholes, and most of all from an insufficient sense of the duty incumbent on us all to form determinate estimates of the characters and moral incidents around us, if only to form the landmarks and bearings for our own conduct in life. These features remain in the *Newcomes*. There is the same want of ballasting thought, the same see-saw between cynicism and sentiment, the same suspension of moral judgment. The indignant impulse prompts the lash, and the hand at once delivers it, while the mind hangs back, doubts its justice, and sums up after execution with an appeal to our charity on the score of the undecipherable motives of human action, the heart's universal power of self-deception, and the urgency of fate and circumstance.

THE MISS BRONTËS.*

[July 1857.]

FRIENDS and friendly biographers are apt to ask too much from "the public," and from the critic who expresses an individual atom of public judgment. There is such a thing as being unjust to the judges. It is unjust to require of readers—all of whom more or less form opinions on an author—that the personal qualities of the writer, unblemished purity of life, exalted heroism, or heroic self-denial, should blind them to errors of style or dullness of story. It is constantly urged, more or less directly, that Smith must write sense because he supports an aged mother, and Amelia be true to nature because all her friends love her so much; and when these claims are ignored, there is irritation and outcry. "It is well," Mrs. Gaskell writes, "that the thoughtless critics, who spoke of the sad and gloomy views of life presented by the Brontës in their tales, should know how such words were wrung out of them by the living recollection of the

* *The Life of Charlotte Brontë, Author of "Jane Eyre," "Shirley," "Villette," &c.* By E. C. Gaskell, Author of "Mary Barton," "Ruth," &c. 2 vols. London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1857.

Miss Brontë's Novels. London: same Publishers.

Wuthering Heights, and Agnes Grey. By Ellis and Acton Bell. A new edition, revised; with a Biographical Notice of the Authors, a Selection from their Literary Remains, and a Preface. By Currer Bell. London: same Publishers, 1851.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. By Acton Bell. Hodgson.

Poems. By Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1846.

long agony they suffered." Why thoughtless critics? They had penetration enough, it seems, to point out a leading feature in the books; and they must have been more than thoughtful to penetrate the secret domestic sorrows of the family and take them into account in characterising their written productions. A living author is known to the world by his works only, or, if not so, it is with his works alone that the public are concerned; and he has no cause of complaint if he is fairly judged by them without any allowance for the private conditions under which they were produced. On the other hand, he has the corresponding right to demand that personal considerations and private information shall not be dragged in as elements of literary judgment, and that his publicity as an artist shall give no pretext for invading the seclusion of his private life. While we disregard the weak and unfounded complaints we so often hear of "unsympathising" criticism, we must all allow that no terms of reprobation are too strong for forced and unwarrantable intrusions into the personal sanctuary. When an author is dead and his biography is written, especially what may be called a private biography as distinguished from a simple record of public actions, some of the restrictions never justly infringed during the lifetime are removed. The sphere which is voluntarily opened to the public measures the range of the critic. By the very act of admitting us to the interior of a life and character we are invited to examine it; and if such a biography is to have any value, opinions on it must be freely formed and freely expressed.

In writing the life of the late Mrs. Nicholls, Mrs. Gaskell had more than ordinary difficulties to contend with. She had to depict an existence whose interest consisted in the singular characteristics of the narrow home in which it passed, in the spectacle of genius contending against circumstance, not on the wide stage of the world, but within the walls of one household, in

energy struggling not against the outward blows of fate, but against the trials of the heart, and still more against isolation and repression. So narrow was the stage, so few the actors, that it was impossible to illuminate one without letting in the light on others who stood closely grouped around the central figure, and without laying bare to the public eye the closest, and by all men most jealously guarded, secrets of domestic life. The biographer who has to deal with such a life must choose between a mode of treatment which reduces his field to the limits of a memoir, and scarcely allows him to do justice to his task, or one which, on the other hand, is sure in its wider scope to do some injury to the rights and susceptibilities of others. Mrs. Gaskell made her choice, and has unflinchingly acted upon it. In the warmth of her admiration for her friend, in her determination to interest the public in her conscientious self-denying character and her joyless life, she has let no considerations interfere with her purpose of presenting her subject in all the detail necessary to its complete appreciation, and with all that force of graphic delineation of which she is so great a master.

Frankly we will state our conviction, that she was mistaken; that the principles and the practice which in England make it indecorous to withdraw the veil from purely domestic affairs,—the joys, the griefs, the shames of the household,—have a true basis in fortitude and delicacy of feeling, and are paramount to the consideration of gratifying public curiosity, or even to that of securing a full appreciation for the private character of a distinguished artist. Don't let us deceive ourselves about the moral lesson in the present case; it is either so exceptional as to have no common application, or it is one which all who wish may gather for themselves within the range of their own family experience. And let us remember too, that, without pressing real domestic events into the service, we have in our modern novels sufficient

scope for supplying that pleasurable excitement of our better feelings, now so common a luxury, and which is in danger with many of us of replacing the effort to find them a field for their actual exercise.

After this protest, we are free to echo the universal opinion as to the skill with which a difficult work has been executed, and an absorbing interest given to the narrative; rather, we should say, to the felicity with which its native elements of interest have been marshalled and arrayed. The writer, indeed, has gently evaded the responsibility of giving us her own conception of the characters she is describing. This, perhaps, is a thing that we have no right to demand of her, but it would have added much to the value of her work to have had a clear view of the impression produced by the whole of Miss Brontë's character on any mind which had had opportunities of studying her intimately. This is the simplest, the most trustworthy, almost the only way in which we can gain any adequate comprehension of a nature which we have not known at first hand. But Mrs. Gaskell neither loves to form a judgment herself, nor is she very willing that others should do so. She admits the right of divergence of opinion, but is almost as sensitive to the exercise of it as Miss Brontë herself. Not to echo her own enthusiasm is an unfailing mark of superficial insight and shallow thought. She has a tendency to hector us all, in a lady-like way, into unqualified admiration; and when very angry, she whips the critics severely with her pocket-handkerchief. What she stigmatises as want of sympathy, excites her bitterness. She prefers the Transatlantic school of criticism, and thinks praise cannot be too like Devonshire cream. She approves the American clergyman, whose tribute seems to us more difficult of digestion than any censure, however harsh and undeserved. "We have," writes the reverend gentleman,—"we have in our sacred of sacreds a special shelf, highly adorned, as a place we delight to honour, of novels

which we recognise as having had a good influence on character—our character. Foremost is *Jane Eyre*."

With all its excellences, and they are many, this book has a trace of the cant of paneulogism. It is of a very different description from that which Charlotte Brontë herself would have written under similar circumstances,—very dissimilar from those brief, outspoken, truthful sentences in which she characterises her sisters in the short and eloquent tribute which she has paid to their memory. Charlotte Brontë's character could have borne a thoroughly open and honest picture of what defects it had, and borne it better than it can bear one or two slight and almost friendly hints,—such as that of "slight astringencies" of character in the lady-novelist, in sentences written concerning her married life.

These are shortcomings, no doubt, yet the completeness of the work in other respects goes far to compensate us for them; whatever can be derived from sequence of events, external description, and such indications of personal character as letters afford, is furnished in the fullest abundance. The biographer's command of language, and her talent of description, at once powerful and delicate, enable her to depict with wondrous vividness the scenes in which this painful and secluded drama of life was presented, and the conditions under which it was played out to its melancholy close. Sadly and strangely the story reads, from the time when the motherless and little less than fatherless children sit self-companioned in the gloomy candleless kitchen, or return with wet and weary feet to a smell only of dry boots, to that when the last of them, after a life deeply scarred with those sharp struggles of which the heart is the arena, parted at last with a cry of reluctance from a brief spell of happy days. It is not keen and protracted suffering, or great calamities, which give its sorrowful character to this family history,—though of these too it embraced its full share; but there is a sunlessness, a gray shadow over the house, from the

pressure of which none of its members seem to escape even for a moment. Nothing happy, genial, or expansive gilds their brief day; joy rarely, if ever, comes to elevate them; and grief has no power to strike them down, it can only crush them lower. How far the temperament, common under varied aspects to the three sisters, was due to the circumstances of their life, or how far to peculiarities of nature and race, it is impossible to determine. They seem curious offspring of the eccentric, strong-willed Irish father, and the simple, mild, Cornish mother. It is as if the churchyard-air they breathed, and the strong cold breezes from the moor, had entered into their very nature, and made them what they were.

Yet they were clearly not children of the soil; the glowing embers that lay but half smothered at the bottom of the character of two at least of them, had in them more of the Southern and Celtic element than of the Northman's opener clearer fire. Half England now has formed an idea of Yorkshire on what these sisters have written; yet we doubt if they ever understood the north-country character. They studied its exceptional aspects, and familiarity with its external traits enabled them to give life-like costume to their pictures; but their narrow and secluded natures had neither the range nor the opportunity to grasp the broader characteristics of the people among whom they lived, and the north country has received considerable injustice at their hands. They described one or two mere general characteristics, such as "the contrast of rough nature with highly artificial cultivation," and they delineated fully a confined set of very special characters. But all Yorkshiremen are not Helstones, Yorkees, Crimsworths, or Hunsdens. The timid lady who, after a perusal of some of the Brontë novels, declared she would rather visit the Red Indians than trust herself in Leeds society, may be reassured. Rude the North is perhaps, and keen and over-engrossed in

personal objects, far-sighted rather than wide-ranging in vision, and sagacious rather than wise ; in the manufacturing districts especially there is much that is repulsive in coarseness of manners and greed of wealth, or rather in a sort of obtrusive self-satisfaction in these defects : but it is not true that, either in East Lancashire or Yorkshire, pity is an extinct passion, nor that the great mass of the men are selfish in heart, bull-dogs in temper, and bores in demeanour. Whatever the outside may be, at bottom the poet's saying may be trusted, that

“Dark and true and tender is the North.”

The close shadow of the Brontës' churchyard-home, the bitter winds, and the wild dark aspect of their moors, have left the mark of their influence upon the writings as well as upon the characters of the sisters. They want softness, variety, beauty ; they are too often dark, hopeless, and uncomfortable : on the other hand, they are vigorous and fresh, and bear welcome traces of Nature's close companionship with the minds from which they sprang. A personal impress is strongly marked on them. It is curious that, though the writers all had strong imaginations, not one of them had the power to get rid for a moment of her own individuality. It permeates with its subtle presence every page they write. They were not engaging persons, and they felt that they were not—felt it acutely, and made others unduly sensible of it. Nor did they care to see others in their more agreeable and engaging aspects. They had been brought into close contact with the darker shades of character, and they instinctively studied them and reproduced them ; too often they used light to give a greater depth to shadow, rather than shadow to set off light. It is in Emily's works, as in her own nature, that the darkness lies deepest. None of them are at home in sunny weather ; but Emily has drawn mid-winter and thunderous skies. The clouds are

ragged and dreadful, illumined for short glimpses by tempest fire:

“Storm and hail and thunder,
And the winds that rave,”

are the material correspondents of those dread perturbations of the human spirit in which she found herself at home. Her temperament was a strange, even a distorted one. There must have been a fund of ferocity in her own nature strangely mingled with tenderness. “Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her whole nature stood alone.” So says her sister. She could not tolerate the contact of other wills. Isolation became a necessary of her life; she could not endure her reserve to be infringed, and the demonstrations at least of her affection were reserved for the dumb creation. One who knew her, said of her, “She never showed regard to any human creature; all her love was reserved for animals.” In her last illness, her sisters dared neither question nor assist her. As her body sank, her will seemed to get stronger. To the very gate of death she walked alone, not from necessity but from choice, rejecting all aid from medicine, refusing the sympathies that hung so tenderly around her, and compelling her wasted frame to continue independent of all assistance from others. “The awful point,” says Charlotte, “was, that while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hand, the unnerved limbs, the faded eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health. To stand by and witness this, and not dare to remonstrate, was a pain no words can render.”

A less degree of this sort of Stoicism and self-immolation is not uncommon in people of strong wills; but except in youth, before we have learnt the value of even the meanest of us to other hearts, it is not in general compatible with strong affections. Persons gifted with these soon learn to appreciate the truth, that to be cruel

to oneself is often to be yet more cruel to others ; and that self-indulgence, paradoxical as it seems, may sometimes conceal itself under the guise of self-sacrifice. But Emily was young ; and all the sisters seem to have been united by ties of deep and fervent, even passionate affection. Yet they all had that unhappy gift of feelings strong out of all proportion to their power of bringing them to the surface. If those who express habitually more than they feel deserve contempt, those deserve pity who can give no utterance to what they do feel, and most unwise are they who wittingly hide away in the recesses of their hearts riches which were meant to be freely spent for the welfare of themselves and others. Their treasure is like the buried gold of the miser ; it is stored up apart from its true uses. It yields no interest of happiness or joy ; yet if it be stolen away, the agony of loss is not the less bitter. It is a mistake to suppose that affections are the more powerful for being concealed. Like other great gifts they rust unused, and their true use is to let them flow forth easily and freely. It is on the evidences of affection that the heart feeds ; and he who drinks of other springs, and gathers his own in a deep well, must look closely to it lest the waters stagnate. Concentrated on few objects, love may become more strong ; but the more it is concentrated, the closer it approaches to self-love.

How mere a self-love it may become, how mere a passionate wilful surrender to native instincts, has nowhere received a more vivid and terrible artistic delineation than in Emily Brontë's tale of *Wuthering Heights*. In force of genius, in the power of conceiving and uttering intensity of passion, Emily surpassed her sister Charlotte. On the other hand, her range seems to have been still more confined. The atmosphere of the book obscures the elements of character and incident ; it is like gazing on a storm which melts together and shrouds in rain and gloom all the distinctive features of the landscape. It is idle to deny that the book is revolting.

That a wickedness, whose only claim to attention is its intensity, that the most frightful excesses of degrading vices, snarling hypocrisy, an almost idiotic imbecility of mind and body, combined with a cruel and utterly selfish nature,—that these things should not excite abhorrence is impossible ; and they occupy so large a space in the book, they seem displayed so much for their own sake, that it is impossible the whole work should not obtain a share of the sentiment. We may admire, but not without horror, the stern, unflinching hand with which the author drives her keen plough through the worst recesses of the human heart, nothing surprised at what she finds there, nothing concerned at what she uproots ; accepting every thing as the simple bent of nature, referring to no higher standard, and letting no sign escape her either of approval or condemnation. Unsparing vindictiveness and savage brutality are depicted in all their native deformity. Art throws aside her prerogative to dwell on beautiful and hint at hideous things, and lays bare to day the base actualities of coarse natures and degraded lives. The way in which the imagination of the author is imbued with the fierce uncontrolled tone of the work is shown remarkably in its overriding essential probabilities, as, for instance, in the way in which Isabella Linton's and the younger Catherine's temper and character become so immediately assimilated in coarseness and malice to those of Heathcliff's household. We dare not question Charlotte Brontë's judgment, when she says of her sisters that they were "genuinely good and truly great." How the will and the life may have moulded the character, we are not competent to discern ; and therefore we do not say that in the character, but that in the original temperament of Emily, there must have been some strange sympathy with the fierce natures she revels in delineating. We cannot help shrinking from a mind which could conceive and describe, even as occurring in a dream, the rubbing backwards and forwards of a child's hand along

the jagged glass in a broken window-pane till the blood flowed down upon the bed. "Having formed these beings," says Charlotte, "she did not know what she had done. If the auditor of her work, when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night, and disturbed mental peace by day,—Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant, and suspect the complainant of affectation."

Her sister goes on to prophesy that the matured fruits of her mind would have thrown into the shade this early and immature production. But we doubt it. We doubt, at least, whether she could ever have taken any very high place in dramatic literature. In *Wuthering Heights* there is an unmistakable tendency to subordinate differences of character to vividness of narration. Rather, we should say, it shows the absence of any power of intuitive insight into characters widely differing from one another and from the author. All the characters described in the book are within a very narrow range, and have a tendency to run into one another. Yet the whole story embodies a wonderful effort of imagination. It is not painted in detail from observation or reflection, but caught up, as it were, into the highest heaven of imagination, and flung out from thence into the world, with scornful indifference to the restrictions of art and the judgment of men. All is fused together as by fire; and the reader has neither power nor inclination to weigh probabilities or discuss defects. He shudders as he reads, and feels as one may imagine a modern Englishman would feel in gazing at the gladiatorial shows of ancient Rome; but the laceration of his feelings deadens him to the bearings of details. There is humour in Joseph, rude and harsh though it be; a quality not discernible in any of the other writings of the sisters (we do not except the

curate scene) ; and once, though once only, Heathcliff shows in such a light that it is possible for pity to mingle with our detestation. It is when, after Catherine's death, he stands on his hearth-stone, his passion spent, and his spirit overwhelmed by the sense of his desolation.

"Heathcliff did not glance my way ; and I gazed up, and contemplated his features almost as confidently as if they had been turned to stone. His forehead, that I once thought so manly, and that I now think so diabolical, was shaded with a heavy cloud ; his basilisk-eyes were nearly quenched by sleeplessness, and weeping, perhaps, for the lashes were wet then ; his lips devoid of their ferocious sneer, and sealed in an expression of unspeakable sadness.

Mr. Earnshaw looked up, like me, to the countenance of our mutual foe ; who, absorbed in his anguish, seemed insensible to any thing around him. The longer he stood, the plainer his reflections revealed their blackness through his features.

'O, if God would but give me strength to strangle him in my last agony, I'd go to hell with joy,' groaned the impatient man, writhing to rise, and sinking back in despair, convinced of his inadequacy for the struggle.

'Nay, it's enough that he has murdered one of you,' I observed aloud. 'At the Grange, every one knows your sister would have been living now had it not been for Mr. Heathcliff. After all, it is preferable to be hated than loved by him. When I recollect how happy we were—how happy Catherine was before he came—I'm fit to curse the day.'

Most likely, Heathcliff noticed more the truth of what was said than the spirit of the person who said it. His attention was roused, I saw, for his eyes rained down tears among the ashes, and he drew his breath in suffocating sighs. I stared full at him, and laughed scornfully. The clouded windows of hell flashed a moment towards me ; the fiend which usually looked out, however, was so dimmed and drowned, that I did not fear to hazard another sound of derision."

"The clouded windows of hell flashed a moment towards me"! What a wealth of tragic utterance there is in the phrase ! Entirely out of place, indeed, in the mouth by which it is uttered, as is the whole of this description ; but in true keeping with the strain which un-

derlies the whole wild harmony. Never, perhaps, has unbridled ferocity and unassuageable vindictiveness found so adequate a delineator as in this young girl. If her book have any moral, it serves, as we before observed, to show how fierce, how inhuman a passion personal attachment to another may become, and how reckless of the welfare of its object; and this, too, not the love which sinks from the human level into the sensual appetite of the brutes, but the pure love of souls. For such is the passion of Heathcliff and Catherine. The life-like presentation of how such a love may be compatible with selfishness utterly unredeemed is, if not the conscious teaching of the author, yet the prominent lesson of her rude titanic story, "rich with barbaric gems and crusted gold."

The only other evidence which Emily Brontë has left of her remarkable genius, is to be found in her few short poems, for which Charlotte justly claimed an appreciation that they have never obtained. They show a scarcely less forcible and a finer side of her nature than *Wuthering Heights*. They want the finish of an accomplished writer; but they have a true music of their own answering to the sense. It is rarely, indeed, that poetry written early in life stands so independent as does this of any trace of the influence of other minds. But here the writer has looked with her own eyes on Nature and into her own heart (rarely, if ever, beyond these two), and with genuine simplicity and native vigour her poet's instinct gives a voice to what she has seen and experienced. The following lines breathe a softer influence than most of the poetry. Wordsworth himself might have acknowledged them.

"Often rebuked, yet always back returning
To those first feelings that were born with me,
And leaving busy chase of wealth and learning
For idle dreams of things which cannot be :

To-day I will seek not the shadowy region,
Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear ;

And visions rising, legion after legion,
Bring the unreal world too strangely near.

I'll walk, but not in old heroic traces,
And not in paths of high morality,
And not among the half-distinguished faces,
The clouded forms of long-past history.

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading :
It vexes me to choose another guide :
Where the gray flocks in ferny glens are feeding,
Where the wild wind blows on the mountain-side.

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing ?
More glory and more grief than I can tell :
The earth, that wakes *our* human heart to feeling,
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell."

"Liberty," says Charlotte, "was the breath of Emily's nostrils ;" and there are some verses, christened "The Old Stoic," which give expression to this deep-seated impatience of restraint which lay so near the heart of the young Stoic who wrote them :

"Riches I hold in light esteem ;
And Love I laugh to scorn ;
And lust of fame was but a dream
That vanished with the morn :

And if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, 'Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty !'

Yes, as my swift days near their goal,
'Tis all that I implore ;
In life and death, a chainless soul,
With courage to endure."

There is something fine in her free undaunted spirit, her hidden tenderness, her passionate love of Nature and of home, her genius and her unconquerable fortitude. She died young, snatched away by rapid decline ; and though we, who are strange to her, look on her with a sort of compelled and fearful admiration, there were passionate tears shed over her by those who associated with her in every-day life.

In less than another six months the youngest sister, Anne, followed Emily to the grave. Her death was in as marked contrast to that of her sister as her character had been. If it be proper at all to withdraw the veil from these sad privacies of domestic life, and carry us with so much minute detail into the chamber of death, we must own that, in the present instance, it has been done with all delicacy and respect. It is a calm and tender scene, in which the pious spirit gently and patiently, and filled to the last with affectionate thoughtfulness for those she was leaving, unmoors from the shores of life and fades into the unknown sea. Anne must have had much of her Cornish mother in her. Concerning the latter, Mrs. Gaskell has been able to gather a few picturesque details, and portrays her with a sort of soft melancholy interest to our eyes. Like her, Anne was "meek and retiring, while possessing more than ordinary talents; and her piety was genuine and unobtrusive." Though gentle, she was not weak; she possessed her full share of that independence of external support which distinguished all the sisters, and her share too of their constitutional reserve. But she had an unaffected humility, and lived more in purposes entirely apart from herself than either of the others. Charlotte speaks of her life as having been passed under the tyranny of a too tender conscience, and of her religious feeling as partaking in a milder form of the sad hallucinations of Cowper. The former we can well understand; but neither her writings, nor the occasional glimpses of her life which we obtain, seem to warrant the idea that she suffered in any degree from the disease of religious melancholy. Indeed, her sister probably scarcely meant us to infer so much as this. *Agnes Grey* reflects so accurately all we hear of her, that we can scarcely be wrong in supposing that it shadows forth her character as well as a part of her experiences. Without wishing to seem paradoxical, we cannot help thinking that Anne had more of the artist's

faculties than either of her sisters. Her stories are much more homogeneous in their structure, her characters more consistent, and, though less original and striking, conducted with a nicer perception of dramatic propriety. Grimsby, Hattersley, and Lord Lowborough—unfilled outlines as they are—are more of real men than Heathcliff, Rochester, or Dr. John. The revolting scenes in *Wildfell Hall* were drawn, in despite of a natural reluctance for the task, from a sense of the duty of sparing no blackening touch in the picture of an odious vice; a mistaken duty,—as we think it (for these gross pictures of excess cannot touch those whom alone they are adapted to benefit),—but in the discharge of which the writer has displayed no common powers both of insight and delineation. The hero spoils the book. Anne meant him to be a gentleman; but she was ignorant of the manners and demeanour of a gentleman, and she has given us instead a truculent ill-bred young farmer, with strong feelings, an active mind, and a most offensively good opinion of himself. Lawrence, who is meant to be the not very strong, somewhat over-refined, reserved, fine gentleman, she is not able to draw at all. She had no materials to enable her to do so.

Charlotte Brontë, older than her two sisters, differed widely from them in character. Hers was a mind fitted to shine in society, at least as well as to write in solitude. The absolute seclusion which was to Emily a necessary, and to Anne a protection, was too often felt by Charlotte as a prison, in which the ties of affection and the claims of duty, to which none ever yielded a more loyal and unconditional obedience, alone had power to bind her. Hers was an active, eager spirit, which thirsted for knowledge and experience; which took a warm interest in the characters and actions of men, and would willingly have seen them with her own eyes, and studied them from the life. Some of her letters indicate how much it cost her willingly to immure herself within the narrow sphere which Pro-

vidence had assigned her ; and one of her friends has recorded a conversation which shows with how much even of horror she contemplated the narrow cell-like existence before her, and with how unfaltering a will she remained true to what she deemed, and not unjustly, to be her nearest duty, that of consoling and upholding her aged father, and of sharing with the others those gloomy trials to which the misconduct of their brother subjected them.

“When last I saw Charlotte,” says one of the two most intimate friends she had, “she told me she had quite decided to stay at home. She owned she did not like it. Her health was weak. She said she should like any change at first, as she had liked Brussels at first ; and she thought that there must be some possibility for some people of having a life of more variety and more communion with humankind, but she saw none for her. I told her very warmly that she ought not to stay at home ; that to spend the next five years at home, in solitude and weak health, would ruin her ; that she would never recover it. Such a dark shadow came over her face when I said, ‘Think of what you’ll be five years hence,’ that I stopped, and said, ‘Don’t cry, Charlotte!’ She did not cry ; but went on walking up and down the room, and said in a little while, ‘But I intend to stay, Polly!’”

And she did stay : not only five, but ten years she spent, with only occasional brief absences, in that contracted home, soon rendered all but solitary by the swiftly-repeated strokes of death ; and there she died. All England is now familiar with that home ; has seen, with the mind’s eye at least, the plain gray-stone house, looking across the well-filled graveyard to the ancient little church at the top of the steep hill at Haworth, with the undulating wild moors, “purple-black,” above and beyond it : every one knows the little fireless room and the flagged kitchen in which the precocious little Brontës lived, unvisited by the dying mother or the eccentric father ; and, trained to forego the usual vivacity of childhood, read their newspapers and invented their plays, with Wellington and Bonaparte for their *dramatis personæ*.

There were six of them in these first days, before the two eldest died. These were Maria, the Helen of *Jane Eyre*, and of whom her father tells us that before the age of eleven "he could converse with her on any of the leading topics of the day with as much freedom and pleasure as with any grown-up person," and Elizabeth, of whom we only know by one little anecdote that she shared the characteristic patience and fortitude of the family.

Among these children, Charlotte was the quick and clever one. The servants thought her "sharp," and declared they must mind what they said before her; and her first schoolmistress describes her as a "bright, clever, happy little girl, never in disgrace." One of her school-fellows furnishes a likeness of her at the age of thirteen, which is graphic enough in other respects, and contains one fact specially characteristic:

"I first saw her coming out of a covered cart, in very old-fashioned clothes, and looking very cold and miserable. She was coming to school at Miss Wooller's. When she appeared in the schoolroom, her dress was changed, but just as old. She looked a little old woman, so short-sighted, that she always appeared to be seeking something, and moving her head from side to side to catch a sight of it. She was very shy and nervous, and spoke with a strong Irish accent. When a book was given her, she dropped her head over it till her nose nearly touched it; and when she was told to hold her head up, up went the book after it, still close to her nose, so that it was not possible to help laughing."

Anne took after her mother, but Charlotte after her father. The little girl "spoke with a strong Irish accent." This tells more completely than any thing else in what complete seclusion she must have lived, and that the characteristics of her father's race were prominent in her. Living all her life in Yorkshire, Mr. Brontë the only person near her of Irish blood, and associating but little with him, she yet spoke in the accent of his country. The way in which, in her child-writings, she imitates Tabby's pronunciation, seems to show that the Yorkshire dialect

always sounded strange to them. But Charlotte seems to have been the most Irish among them, except perhaps Branwell. From Ireland she derived her eloquence and vehemence, and from Ireland her keen susceptibilities, both physical and mental. No common force and fire of nature lay hidden beneath her plain and fragile exterior, and gleamed through her eyes sometimes with a sudden brilliancy that startled the spectator. Mrs. Gaskell has given a good description of this feature in her face, and of the rest of her personal appearance. Her eyes

“were large and well shaped ; their colour a reddish brown ; but if the iris was closely examined, it appeared to be composed of a great variety of tints. The usual expression was of quiet, listening intelligence ; but now and then, on some just occasion for vivid interest or wholesome indignation, a light would shine out, as if some spiritual lamp had been kindled, which glowed behind those expressive orbs. I never saw the like in any other human creature. As for the rest of her features, they were plain, large, and ill set ; but, unless you began to catalogue them, you were hardly aware of the fact, for the eyes and power of the countenance overbalanced every physical defect ; the crooked mouth and the large nose were forgotten, and the whole face arrested the attention, and presently attracted all those whom she herself would have cared to attract. Her hands and feet were the smallest I ever saw ; when one of the former was placed in mine, it was like the soft touch of a bird in the middle of my palm. The delicate long fingers had a peculiar fineness of sensation, which was one reason why all her handiwork, of whatever kind,—writing, sewing, knitting,—was so clear in its minuteness. She was remarkably neat in her whole personal attire ; but she was dainty as to the fit of her shoes and gloves. I can well imagine that the grave serious composure, which, when I knew her, gave her face the dignity of an old Venetian portrait, was no acquisition of later years, but dated from that early age when she found herself in the position of an elder sister to motherless children.”

We question this ; at least the composure which comes after many years of bitter trial and arduous self-control is very different from the aspect under which a reserved child of thirteen hides the secret things of its

heart and struggling intellect. We doubt if any of the children were unhappy, though perhaps never joyful. The house, which seemed so dreary from the outside, was warm within with mutual affection, and the close intellectual sympathies engendered by the common working of their active minds. Back to their childhood, and to that later time when, in the dim fire-light, the sisters walked to and fro discussing their future lives, or communicating and criticising their several literary efforts, Charlotte always looked as to the sole bright gleam in her life; and none of them could leave home for a time without an irrepressible yearning to return, which in Emily resulted in actual illness.

"This is Sunday morning," writes Charlotte from her *pensionnat* at Brussels; "they are at their idolatrous '*messe*,' and I am here, that is, in the *réfectoire*. I should like uncommonly to be in the dining-room, or in the kitchen, or in the back-kitchen. I should like even to be cutting up the hash, with the clerk and some register-people at the other table, and you standing by, watching that I put enough flour, not too much pepper, and above all, that I save the best pieces of the leg of mutton for Tiger and Keeper; the first of which personages would be jumping about the dish and carving-knife, and the latter standing like a devouring flame on the kitchen floor. To complete the picture—Tabby blowing the fire, in order to boil the potatoes to a sort of vegetable glue! How divine are these recollections to me at this moment!"

A few years later, when occupied as a teacher at Miss Wooller's school, she suffered much from dejection of spirits, and underwent that experience of bitter self-condemnation and black hopelessness through the sharper or more softened terrors of which almost every soul is destined to find its way to higher things.

"If I could always live with you," she writes to her friend E., "and daily read the Bible with you—if your lips and mine could at the same time drink the same draught from the same pure fountain of mercy—I hope, I trust, I might one day become better, far better than my evil wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit and warm to the flesh, will

now permit me to be. I often plan the pleasant life which we might lead together, strengthening each other in that power of self-denial, that hallowed and glowing devotion, which the first saints of God often attained to. My eyes fill with tears when I contrast the bliss of such a state, brightened by hopes of the future, with the melancholy state I now live in, uncertain that I ever felt true contrition, wandering in thought and deed, longing for holiness which I shall *never, never* obtain, smitten at times to the heart with the conviction that ghastly Calvinistic doctrines are true—darkened, in short, by the very shadows of spiritual death. If Christian perfection be necessary to salvation, I shall never be saved; my heart is a very hot-bed for sinful thoughts, and when I decide on an action, I scarcely remember to look to my Redeemer for direction. I know not how to pray; I cannot bend my life to the grand end of doing good; I go on constantly seeking my own pleasure, pursuing the gratification of my own desires.”

Her vivid intellectual interests and longings for a sphere better fitted to her capacities seem to her almost sinful. “If you knew my thoughts, the dreams that absorb me, and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up, and makes me feel society, as it is, wretchedly insipid, you would pity, and, I dare say, despise me.” It is generally necessary to have some external knowledge of an author before we can trace him in his works: but once furnished with a key, it is not difficult, in many writers, to distinguish self-revelations from pure dramatic expressions. In various parts of her works, Miss Brontë has given a voice to this impatience of seclusion, and that desire for a wider experience which we have before mentioned as preying upon her. Jane Eyre speaks for her in this as in many things:

“Any body may blame me who likes, when I add further, that now and then, when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and looked through them along the road; or when, while Adèle played with her nurse, and Mrs. Fairfax made jellies in the store-room, I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along the dim sky-line—that then I

longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit, which might reach the busy world, towns—regions full of life I had heard of, but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs. Fairfax, and what was good in Adèle; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold.

“Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind’s-eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired, and had not in my actual existence.”

Literature seemed to open a field for her energies, and she might have devoted herself to it earlier than she did, had not her first aspirations been quenched by the cooling, sensible reply Southey returned to a letter in which she consulted him on the subject. His answer is a perfectly good one to her letter; but it was impossible he should gather from her letter what her powers were. From the condition of shattered nerves and broken health into which she fell thus early in life, Miss Brontë seems never to have recovered. It combined, with her long habits of secluded existence, to make any unusual effort or new excitement a severe tax upon her. Hence, later on in life, the short and scattered experiences she had of the social intercourse she was naturally so well fitted to enjoy, seem to have brought with them almost as much pain as pleasure.

Her personal appearance, too, seems always to have been a sort of bugbear to her. “I notice,” said she,

“that after a stranger has once looked at my face, he is careful not to let his eyes wander to that part of the room again.” This, a false enough apprehension, as Mrs. Gaskell assures us, joined with those other causes to give her in society an air of constraint and timidity, which it needed the vivid excitement of some strong intellectual interest to enable her to shake off. Her life makes plain, however, what warm affections and genuine kindness were concealed under a demeanour not always attractive. Old servants remember her for little kindly actions in her childhood; home affections centered in her; friendship found her loyal, and love, warm and true. “She thought much of her duty,” writes a friend who knew her from childhood, “and had loftier and clearer notions of it than most people, and held fast to them with more success. It was done, it seems to me, with much more difficulty than people have with stronger nerves and better fortunes. All her life was but labour and pain; and she never threw down the burden for the sake of present pleasure.” Nay, so careful was she in this respect, that an asceticism almost morbid seems sometimes to characterise her actions. She will not accept the common alleviations of her desolate condition after her two sisters’ death, lest they should tend to dissatisfy her with her lot, or render her too dependent on external support. She will not seek relief in the society of her friend from the worst misery of human life, a dejection of spirits heavy almost to despair; she will not even allow herself the indulgence of a frequent correspondence. She was constitutionally destitute of hope, and though never without a just estimate of her mental powers, distrusted excessively her claim to affection and her interest in other hearts. She never leaned on others. It was her principle, that friends, and even husband and wife, should each jealously guard some independent standing-room of his or her own. Though the reverse of exacting, she had no faculty of closing her eyes, and

scrutinised with some closeness the share which each party subscribed in unions of this sort. Mrs. Gaskell bears testimony to her deficiency in hopefulness.

“In looking over the earlier portion (of her correspondence with E.), I am struck afresh by the absence of hope, which formed such a strong characteristic in Charlotte. At an age when girls, in general, look forward to an eternal duration of such feelings as they or their friends entertain, and can therefore see no hindrance to the fulfilment of any engagements dependent on the future of the affections, she is surprised that E. keeps her promise to write. In after-life, I was painfully impressed with the fact, that Miss Brontë never dared to allow herself to look forward with hope; that she had no confidence in the future; and I thought, when I heard of the sorrowful years she had passed through, that it had been this pressure of grief which had crushed all buoyancy of expectation out of her. But it appears from the letters that it must have been, so to speak, constitutional; or, perhaps, the deep pang of losing her two elder sisters combined with a permanent state of bodily weakness in producing her hopelessness. If her trust in God had been less strong, she would have given way to unbounded anxiety at many a period of her life. As it was, we shall see, she made a great and successful effort to leave ‘her times in His hands.’”

Absence of hope in her was not only a moral deficiency, but extended its influence over her intellect. She always looked at things as they were in the immediate present, without looking forward to the modifications they might undergo in the future. She never represents the growth of character, or the influence of circumstances and of the will in changing it. She accepts her own and that of others as something settled; and while displaying and advocating a rigid conformity to duty in action, she studies but little its reflex influence on the actor. Hence partly it is that she is too much disposed to accept all men's natures with a somewhat unusual tolerance. Emily, as we have before remarked, had the same tendency, though in a far greater degree; and some lines of hers express it so clearly that we are tempted to quote them, though we have already perhaps indulged ourselves suffi-

ciently in this matter. But Emily Brontë's poetry is little known, and always worth reading.

Stanzas to ———.

“ Well, some may hate, and some may scorn,
And some may quite forget thy name ;
But my sad heart must ever mourn
Thy ruined hopes, thy blighted fame !
’Twas thus I thought, an hour ago,
Even weeping o’er that wretch’s woe ;
One word turned back my gushing tears,
And lit my altered eye with sneers.
Then ‘ Bless the friendly dust,’ I said,
‘ That hides thy unlamented head !
Vain as thou wert, and weak as vain,
The slave of Falsehood, Pride, and Pain,—
My heart has nought akin to thine ;
Thy soul is powerless over mine.’

But these were thoughts that vanished too ;
Unwise, unholy, and untrue :
Do I despise the timid deer,
Because his limbs are fleet with fear ?
Or would I mock the wolf’s death-howl,
Because his form is gaunt and foul ?
Or hear with joy the leveret’s cry,
Because it cannot bravely die ?
No ! Then above his memory
Let Pity’s heart as tender be ;
Say, ‘ Earth, lie lightly on that breast,
And, kind Heaven, grant that spirit rest ! ’ ”

Strong as was her fancy, Miss Brontë's was an eminently practical mind. She seemed to have the power of reserving her imaginative faculties for a sphere of their own, and excluded them almost too entirely from the domain of actual life. Though her limited experience of the world may have betrayed her into some blunders,—they were wonderfully few,—a sound practical judgment distinguishes her: her letters to her publishers are perfectly business-like, clear, succinct, and direct to the purpose. She has the whip-hand of her genius, and

compels it to go in harness and draw to a purpose. When the *Professor* was declined for want of "startling incident" and "thrilling excitement," she sat down there and then to write a book which should be more to the public taste. Her object was to find not "fit audience though few," but a purchasing publisher and a reading public; and she went straight to her object. If she thus wrote worse than she might have done had she been more independent, the fault was not hers, but that of her necessities and of the public taste. Since literature has become a lucrative profession, it necessarily shares the disadvantages of that position. To reach—even to aim—at his own highest idea, an artist must be untrammelled by the opinion of the day, and he must have the self-denial, scarcely human, to see others placed on the highest pinnacle of popular applause, where he knows he might sit if he would, and bide his own time on a lower elevation. He who writes, or paints, or carves for bread or profit must secure, as the first condition of his object, the public attention. In time he may come to command it; and then is his time to scorn the patronage of critics and circulating libraries, and be true to his highest promptings. Unfortunately, in almost every case his servitude has unfitted him for freedom; his lofty desires have faded; his eye is dimmed; mist hides even the blue heavens; his ears are dull to catch the fine ærial harmonies, and his cramped wing refuses to sustain him in the clearer loftier air. One great reason of the surpassing excellence which almost always distinguishes the early stages of a new growth of Art—one thing which, in literature, has helped to make Dante and Shakspeare and Goethe so noble in their freedom, is the absence of those fine silken bands of public opinion, which, scarcely visible, and all but unfelt by the artist, yet hamper him with a closer constriction than iron links of external tyranny. Enthralled, in some degree, as the professional writer necessarily is, he is, however, in any case, bound not to sacri-

fice principles or truth; to bow, as little as he can, to a false popular taste, and to do all in his power to elevate it. And no one, we think, can accuse Miss Brontë of failing in these respects. She used her high powers under a full sense of the responsibility they entailed. She was true to the main bent of her genius; and neither adverse criticism, to which she was keenly, even unduly, sensitive, nor the desire for applause, could induce her to quit that rugged pathway, for which she felt she was adapted, for smoother and more flowery fields of Art.

Her judgment was instinctive sense, however, rather than a power of deducing correct conclusions. She had no taste for abstract thought; observation and imagination absorbed her intellectual activity. You never find her pursuing trains of thought, or deriving conclusions from a process of reasoning. Politics, social reforms, the various questions of the day, on which most active minds form an opinion, may have interested her, but they did not form the subject of her thoughts. She meddled little or not at all with matters that require a solution; but she treasured experience in whatever form it came; and her notes on life and criticisms on books are always worth listening to; often penetrating and profound. We can give no better proof of this than by quoting one or two of her scattered criticisms on well-known books:

“I have read the *Saint's Tragedy*. As a ‘work of Art’ it seems to me far superior to either *Alton Locke* or *Yeast*. Faulty it may be, crude and unequal, yet there are portions where some of the deep chords of human nature are swept with a hand which is strong even while it falters. We see throughout (I *think*) that Elizabeth has not, and never had, a mind perfectly sane. From the time that she was what she herself, in the exaggeration of her humility, calls ‘an idiot girl,’ to the hour when she lay moaning in visions on her dying bed, a slight craze runs through her whole existence. This is good; this is true. A sound mind, a healthy intellect, would have dashed the priest-power to the wall; would have defended her natural affections from his grasp, as a lioness

defends her young ; would have been as true to husband and children, as your leal-hearted little Maggie was to her Frank. Only a mind weak with some fatal flaw *could* have been influenced as was this poor saint's. But what anguish, what struggles ! Seldom do I cry over books ; but here my eyes rained as I read. When Elizabeth turns her face to the wall—I stopped—there needed no more.

Deep truths are touched on in this tragedy—touched on, not fully elicited ; truths that stir a peculiar pity—a compassion hot with wrath and bitter with pain. This is no poet's dream ; we know that such things *have* been done ; that minds *have* been thus subjugated, and lives thus laid waste."

Of Mill's article in the *Westminster*, on the Emancipation of Women, she says :

" Well-argued it is—clear, logical—but vast is the hiatus of omission ; harsh the consequent jar on every finer chord of the soul. What is this hiatus ? I think I know ; and, knowing, I will venture to say. I think the writer forgets there is such a thing as self-sacrificing love and disinterested devotion. When I first read the paper, I thought it was the work of a powerful-minded, clear-headed woman, who had a hard, jealous heart, muscles of iron, and nerves of bend leather ; of a woman who had longed for power, and had never felt affection. To many women affection is sweet, and power conquered indifferent ; though we all like influence won. I believe J. S. Mill would make a hard, dry, dismal world of it ; and yet he speaks admirable sense through a great portion of his article, especially when he says, that if there be a natural unfitness in women for men's employment, there is no need to make laws on the subject ; leave all careers open ; let them try ; those who ought to succeed will succeed, or, at least, will have a fair chance ; the incapable will fall back into their right place. He likewise disposes of the 'maternity' question very neatly. In short, J. S. Mill's head is, I dare say, very good, but I feel disposed to scorn his heart. You are right when you say that there is a large margin in human nature over which the logicians have no dominion ; glad am I that it is so."

From her earliest years Charlotte was accustomed to exercise her gifts. She not only dreamed, as so many children do, but wrote down her dreams, and gave them defined artistic forms in tales and poems. The children

had a *Little Magazine* of their own ; they had standing plays to which all contributed, and other esoteric, or "best" plays, confined to two. "Best plays mean secret plays—they are very nice ones ;" so Charlotte informs us. She made a list, in 1830, of her works written up to that time ; and a curious collection of fanciful and poetical titles it presents. Wellington is always the prominent hero. We have, "The strange Incident in the Duke of Wellington's Life ;" "The Duke of Wellington's Adventure in the Cavern ;" "The Marquis of Douro and Lord Charles Wellesley's Tale to the little King and Queens," &c. More purely imaginative are, "The Adventures of Edward de Crack ;" and poems, such as "On seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel ;" "The Lay of the Glass Town ;" "Interior of a Pot-house : a Poem," &c. &c.

Mrs. Gaskell quotes a specimen of Charlotte's early style. It does not contain the poetical picture of the approach of the winds which she finds there ; but it is a very graphic piece of narrative, at once old-fashioned and simple, and shows in all the children a remarkable familiarity with some of the leading names of the day. We cannot help thinking, however, that little Anne, who was then not eight, as Mrs. Gaskell says, but six years old, must have had her heroes suggested to her.

"June the 31st, 1829.—The play of the *Islanders* was formed in December 1827, in the following manner. One night, about the time when the cold sleet and stormy fogs of November are succeeded by the snow-storms and high piercing night-winds of confirmed winter, we were all sitting round the warm blazing kitchen fire, having just concluded a quarrel with Tabby concerning the propriety of lighting a candle, from which she came off victorious, no candle having been produced. A long pause succeeded, which was at last broken by Branwell saying, in a lazy manner, 'I don't know what to do.' This was echoed by Emily and Anne.

Tabby. 'Wha ya may go t' bed.'

Branwell. 'I'd rather do any thing than that.'

Charlotte. 'Why are you so glum to-night, Tabby? Oh! suppose we had each an island of our own.'

Branwell. 'If we had, I would choose the Island of Man.'

Charlotte. 'And I would choose the Isle of Wight.'

Emily. 'The Isle of Arran for me.'

Anne. 'And mine should be Guernsey.'

We then chose who should be chief men in our islands. Branwell chose John Bull, Astley Cooper and Leigh Hunt; Emily, Walter Scott, Mr. Lockhart, Johnny Lockhart; Anne, Michael Sadler, Lord Bentinck, Sir Henry Halford. I chose the Duke of Wellington and two sons, Christopher North and Co., and Mr. Abernethy. Here our conversation was interrupted by the, to us, dismal sound of the clock striking seven, and we were summoned off to bed. The next day we added many others to our list of men, till we got almost all the chief men of the kingdom. After this, for a long time, nothing worth noticing occurred. In June 1828, we erected a school on a fictitious island, which was to contain 1000 children. The manner of the building was as follows. The island was fifty miles in circumference, and certainly appeared more like the work of enchantment than anything real," &c.

The extraordinary feature in these literary productions, however, is the amount of them. The list of Charlotte's works consists of twenty-two of her own volumes, which, taking Mrs. Gaskell's facsimile as about an average page, and she says it is a small one, we have computed would contain above seven thousand five hundred octavo pages such as those in the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, or twenty-five such volumes of three hundred pages each. An allowance must be made for the poetry; but by far the greater part of this seems to have been written in seven months, and the whole of it within eighteen! Mrs. Gaskell may have over-estimated the size of the little volumes; but with every allowance the amount is enormous.

The union of strong imagination and strong love of living realities is the characteristic of her genius. It is she, however, who compels them together, and never permits the former faculty to work except upon a basis of close observation. Her method is the reverse of that of most writers, and does much to give to her works their

great originality of style. Most writers draw upon imagination for their general conception both of character and incident, resting merely on a suggestion of fact, and work up their details from observation. Thackeray does so, Dickens does so ; all great painters of manners necessarily do so. But Miss Brontë is no painter of manners, or of social conditions. Her creations inhabit an exceptional world of their own. She takes her characters and her main field of incident from the world of reality, and furnishes the filling-up from imagination. The phrase she and her sisters used for the creative workings of their young minds shows the bent of their genius. They called it "making" out. They took favourite heroes and starting-points of historical fact, and "made out" sequels to them ; and they pondered on them till the imagined part seemed as real as, or more so than the rest.

It is this power of "making out"—the intense vividness with which she summoned up her creations before her own eyes—that gives their enthralling air of actual fact to her narrations. The events *were* so and so to her ; she seemed to herself to be discovering rather than inventing. She could not fancy and build up at her leisure ; she must wait till she could *see* how it really was. Her father was most anxious *Villette* should end happily ; but how could it ? Monsieur Paul Emmanuel really *did* die at sea. There was no help for it ; all she could do was to conceal his fate in ambiguous phrases. If Miss Brontë gave reality to fiction, her biographer occasionally spreads a little of the varnish of the novel over her facts. She seems even sometimes to have indulged the idea that by force of imagination she could penetrate, as by experience, into the secrets of unknown facts.

"I asked her whether she had ever taken opium, as the description given of its effects in *Villette* was so exactly like what I had experienced ; vivid and exaggerated presence of objects,

of which the outlines were indistinct, or lost in golden mist, &c. She replied, that she had never, to her knowledge, taken a grain of it in any shape, but that she had followed the process she always adopted when she had to describe any thing which had not fallen within her own experience; she had thought intently on it for many and many a night before falling to sleep, wondering what it was like, or how it would be, till at length, sometimes after the progress of her story had been arrested at this one point for weeks, she wakened up in the morning with all clear before her, as if she had in reality gone through the experience, and then could describe it, word for word, as it had happened. I cannot account for this psychologically; I only am sure that it was so, because she said it."

Mrs. Gaskell need not puzzle herself to account for this "psychologically." Let her first be sure that when the live fish are immersed, the water does *not* overflow. *Villette* contains no description of the specific effects of opium, but only the impressions of a half-dazed excited mind. Stronger than that of most writers seems to have been Miss Brontë's experience of that almost tyrannous action of the creative impulse, that sense of possession, when the poet feels himself more an instrument than a voluntary agent, as if some viewless power spoke through him.

"When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master; which will have its own way; putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new moulding characters, giving unthought of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones."

In her novels, it is not so much the whole story as the separate scenes and detached incidents that delight us; and it is not the characters themselves so much as the mode in which they display themselves under particular circumstances. She is perfectly master of the art of narration; her events are linked in so easy and continuous a succession, that the reader loses the sense of

the exquisite art by which it is done ; and the wonderful thing is, that there are no dull places. Long she is sometimes, but never dull. A certain sinewy vigour gives interest to every paragraph. Character is her favourite study ; but, like most people who deliberately study character, she never thoroughly comprehends it. True perception of character seems to be something intuitive. It requires, at any rate, a nature of very extended though not necessarily deep sympathies, which finds something in itself answering to all hints, and ready to gather up all clues. Miss Brontë had nothing of this. She studies the manifestations, the workings of character ; and it is these alone, for the most part, that she is enabled to reproduce. She does this with all her might. In *Shirley*, for instance, with intent and resolute eyes she sits gazing into the human heart. Darkness shades its penetralia ; but her keen vision *shall* pierce the veil ; she *will* compel its secrets to the light. She reads as if she set the characters in her story down before her, and set herself, not to develop them, but to write down what she sees in them. It is not a creation, but a vivisection. The anatomical process pleases us ; or, if this does not interest all, there are always for such the lively details, the stirring events, the expression of feeling, the clash of passions, accompanied by an intellectual byplay of the author's own. But the concrete characters, the persons, do not interest us much. Do any of us really care much for that little elfish Jane, or that ugly muscular sultan, Rochester ? Should we not flee from Lucy Snowe and the little Professor ? Are we not all very much surprised at the Cambridge student who wrote to Currer Bell, and begged to be allowed to consider Jane Eyre and Shirley Keeldar as his sisters ?

Miss Brontë never deals with mere abstractions ; all her people have body, reality, definiteness. But they are too singular. The greatest poets have always been those who have done the greatest things with the old every-day

materials; and who have never, however special may have been their web, omitted to work up with it those threads which connect it with universal interests. Miss Brontë is apt to exclude too much common sympathies and everyday knowledge. Of many of her characters we can scarcely say whether they are truthful or not, they are so different from what we have seen, known, and experienced, either in Lancashire, Yorkshire, or elsewhere. Something Jane Eyre, and Lewis Moore, and Madame Beck, have in common with us, no doubt; but no doubt also much of the charm of Currer Bell's works, and their great popularity, is due to this very thing—the minuteness and accuracy with which she has described unfamiliar scenes and characters; and to the thorough air of novelty which pervades both her subject-matter and her treatment. But this, though the most popular of attractions, is not the most lasting. New readers such works never lack; but few, if any, turn back to them as they do to Fielding, Scott, and Thackeray. It is wearisome to read them even twice over.

Another thing which adds both to the singularity and the want of permanent interest of Miss Brontë's works is, that they have a world of manners of their own. Not a soul in them is represented under the ordinary conditions of propriety of demeanour. Rochester, St. John, the two Moores, Crimsworth, behave like human beings certainly, but as certainly not like English gentlemen. We decline to be referred to Yorkshire, which Mrs. Gaskell treats as a *terra incognita*, of which she is the Columbus. These are neither meant for Yorkshiremen, nor like them. It is just in acquainting Miss Brontë with the forms of social intercourse, and the ordinary modes of expression, that observation would have been of most use as the handmaid of her genius; but the opportunity of such observation she never commanded. Her school of manners,—we use the word in its wide sense,—is an imaginary one, drawn out of her own head; a very ably drawn one it is, and admirably it is made to subserve her characters and her

incidents; but it is one strange to the experience of her readers. In Brussels, she had an opportunity of drawing manners from observation, and she availed herself of it. In the Professor, what a difference between her idea of an Eton man, and her description of his Brussels life; how false a notion she has of the one, and with what unsparing force, yet with how fine a touch, she can mark all she has really seen!

In her love for the study of character, she is apt to be led too far. Her sketches, in which observation alone worked, are admirable. Her Mrs. Reeds, her Miss Temple, her Miss Marchmont, her M. Pelet, are sharp and characteristic; but in her more elaborate efforts she attempts too much. No artist can delineate the whole of the character of a human being; the most successful have been those who, having taken up their creations from a certain point of view, always look at them steadily from thence, throw the light on some side they wish to be prominent, and let the rest fade off into an obscurity which the eye of the reader rounds dimly off, partly by the aid of his own imagination. They indicate a character, and dwell on one side of it. This gives the reader peace; he has time to gather a distinct image, which gains new clearness as he gazes at it. But Miss Brontë gives him no peace, she must always see the reverse side, she is anxious if possible to see both sides at once; she is always making new discoveries in her characters, we never know when we have them. Yet, as we have before said, she never represents them in course of change, never paints development of character; and she is so absorbed with what is before her, so much taken up with the scene immediately in hand, that she is apt insensibly to mould her personages so as to suit it, and give it the highest effect. She forgets what they are, in thinking of what they are doing, and hence they are sometimes different people at different times. Jane Eyre is one person as a child, another with Mr. Rochester, and a third with the St. Johns.

In *Villette*, Graham is one person, Dr. John a second, Dr. Bretton a third. Perhaps he affords the most marked instance of discontinuity of general character in all these novels, and the author herself became sensible of it. In a letter to Mr. Smith, she speaks of being conscious of a defect he had pointed out in "the discrepancy, the want of perfect harmony between Graham's boyhood and manhood." Like most persons with strong creative instincts, the young Brontës had all a strong fancy for drawing; Branwell alone seems to have had any real call for the art. Charlotte took small engravings, and copied them line for line in all their intricacy and minutiae; just so she draws in her novels. She drew on paper with exactness of detail, but out of proportion; just so she draws character. Her child's handwriting, so minute and compressed, yet never abbreviated; microscopic even, yet never fine or delicate; not bold or graceful, but firm and angular,—is, with its quaint distinctive characters, a sort of microcosmic emblem of her genius.

Mr. Lewes, it would seem from one of her letters, warned her to distrust her imagination and rely on her observation. He told her, "real experience is perennially interesting to all men." This is true of experience in its narrowest sense, the personal experience of the recorder; it is much less true of that mixed observation which we usually include within the term. Wiser advice (if, indeed, advice avails any thing in these cases) would have been to rely more on her imagination, and to avoid raw mingling of fact and fancy. The truest and the finest creation she ever made, the one which gives the most indisputable proof of the real greatness of her genius,—is the sensitive, deep-hearted child Paulina; we say the child, for the woman is much less ably and less subtly drawn. To make experience and observation valuable as such, they must be given in their naked simplicity.

To eke out facts by the suggestions of imagination, or to conceal them by a varnish of fancy, is a very decep-

tive and unsatisfactory process. And this is what Currer Bell does with her characters. She selects either an actual living person she has seen, or collects traits of one she has not seen—generally the former, and *modifies* this person to make another. Of course, all imagined forms must have some basis of reality, and our words may seem to import a censure on such creations as Schiller's Joan of Arc, or Kingsley's Elizabeth. In both these, and such as these, there is a very large basis of fact; but the difference between them and Mr. Yorke, and Madame Beck, lies in the fact that in one case the imagination uses the facts as materials for a new creation, in the other it is employed to modify, disguise, and fill up a real figure. Miss Brontë herself was scarcely aware how faithfully she drew from the life; but her close adherence to the matter of her own limited experience is shown by the circumstance that her pictures were recognised as portraits. Hence arose not only defects in her workmanship, but a gross infraction of social rights, and an unpardonable infringement of private confidence; to the wrongfulness of which she seems to have been singularly blind, and unhappily her biographer is equally so. It is true Miss Brontë's portraits were not exact, but this only did the greater mischief. With one single exception, perhaps, that of the picture of her sister Emily as Shirley, they certainly were not flattering; they were sufficient to identify those who were unfortunate enough to have become the subjects of her keen examination; and the variation did only the further injustice of conveying a false impression of them. One of her letters, which is a disclaimer of literal portrait-painting, contains at once a proof that she did copy pretty closely external indications of character, and that she did not seize the inner spirit. The lady to whom she writes recognises the heroes, but not the heroines; for one of whom there seems little doubt, from what we learn in another place, that she herself had stood:

“ You are not to suppose any of the characters in *Shirley*

intended as literal portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never to *dictate*. The heroines are abstractions, and the heroes also. Qualities I have seen, loved, and admired, are here and there put in as decorative gems, to be preserved in that setting. Since you say you could recognise the originals of all except the heroines, pray whom did you suppose the two Moores to represent?"

Currer Bell's novels did not do more, however, than hang up the individuals she chose as her subjects for the comment or ridicule of those who were their immediate neighbours, and penetrating enough to discover them; her biographer has gone a step further, and, where she has not given their names in full, has exposed them to identification by any individual whose curiosity has been excited. Is the lady, who has been so cruelly libelled under the pseudonym of Madame Beck, likely to lead a happier life for the publication of *Villette*, *The Professor*, and the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*? There may not be the least real resemblance between the character in the picture and the person who occupies the corresponding place and is pointed out with so much accuracy; but Mrs. Gaskell should hear a little Brussels gossip, to learn how instant was the identification even before she described the place and printed the names, and when small traits of personal demeanour are found to correspond, it is impossible to prevent the world from believing the rest of the picture correct, and a grievous injustice is done which there is no possibility of remedying. Is the gossiping world to blame, that will misconstrue these things and give them an application they were never intended to have? It may be so; but the more certain it is that the world will act thus, the more carefully is an author bound to avoid the possibility of misconstruction. Can any explanations, any asseverations of those who knew him best, ever free the memory of Mr. Carus Wilson from the unjust stain cast upon it in *Jane Eyre*? What genius has stamped with her hand, false though it be, truth, with

her commonplace asseverations, can never efface. We continue to read the novels, and not the vindictory statements. And if such a charge be true, is there any right to make it? None, certainly. The Eumenides may be alive or dead with Great Pan, as Mrs. Gaskell suggests; but they certainly have not delegated their functions to modern novel-writers. These may, if they choose, satirise general abuses, or stigmatise general wrongs; but to punish individual ones is not within their sphere. The popular novel is a very dangerous weapon; its thrusts can neither be parried nor avoided, and to turn it against individuals is an abuse of power which cannot be too strictly censured.

Miss Brontë did not scruple to use her friends either to "point a moral or adorn a tale." "This occasionally led her into difficulties," is a very indulgent way of characterising the wholesale invasion of domestic confidence described in the following extract; which is but one of the passages in the *Life* by which almost all the prominent characters in Miss Brontë's different novels are identified with real persons. The thing to be regarded is, that this system must have occasionally led *other* people into difficulties:

"In *Shirley* she took the idea of most of her characters from life, although the incidents and situations were, of course, fictitious. . . . The whole family of the Yorkes were, I have been assured, almost daguerreotypes. Indeed, Miss Brontë told me that, before publication, she had sent those parts of the novel in which these remarkable persons are introduced, to one of the sons; and his reply after reading it was simply that 'she had not drawn them strong enough.' From those many-sided sons, I suspect she drew all that there was of truth in the characters of the heroes in her first two works. They, indeed, were almost the only young men she knew intimately besides her brother. There was much friendship, and still more confidence, between the Brontë family and them, although their intercourse was often broken and irregular. There was never any warmer feeling on either side."

They must be strange people who would not feel

grievously injured by being pointed out as the originals of that hard, contentious, selfish set of people, the Yorke family. Miss Brontë represented in Rose and Jessy two dear friends; they may be like, but they are not portraits, they have over them exactly the dark, somewhat disproportioned and forbidding aspect of a daguerreotype. Miss Brontë's drawing always has this effect: she prided herself on not drawing flattering portraits of human nature; but she was unaware how hard and dark her lines were. Of this, and of the different light in which her characters showed to herself to that in which she displayed them to her readers, there is a curious proof in a fact stated by Mrs. Gaskell, viz. that she thought Jane Eyre so like the Francesca of Miss Bremer's *Neighbours*, that she was afraid every one must think she had taken her conception from it. Most of all, however, we confess we are moved for the three curates. They seem so defenceless and so good-humoured about the matter. Every one has a fling at them. The biographer tells us they were "so obtuse in perception." They must be happy men if they don't know how hard they have been hit; but even pachydermatous animals have rights which should be respected. Can we be so sure, too, that they did not feel it? Perhaps they thought it the wiser course to laugh it off. Perhaps they exercised a Christian forgiveness. *Prima facie* one could expect that even

"The poor curate that we tread upon,
In corporal anguish feels a pang as great
As when a rector dies."

Mere curates as they were, however, we cannot help thinking it a little too bad that Miss Brontë should not only wrong them, but scorn them because they submit to wrong:

"The very curates, poor fellows! show no resentment; each characteristically finds solace for his own wounds in crowing over his brethren. Mr. Donne was, at first, a little disturbed; for a week or two he was in disquietude, but he

is now soothed down ; only yesterday I had the pleasure of making him a comfortable cup of tea, and seeing him sip it with revived complacency. It is a curious fact, that since he read *Shirley*, he has come to the house oftener than ever, and been remarkably meek and assiduous to please. Some people's natures are veritable enigmas : I quite expected to have had one good scene at least with him ; but as yet nothing of the sort has occurred."

"The very curates"! but surely we must all have a beginning. The curate is the undeveloped stage (by possibility, at least) of that perfect creature which, in expanded lawn sleeves, with venerable apron in front, and with venerable silk-encased legs, gracefully pendulous behind, soars benignantly into the House of Lords. That very Bishop of Ripon, whose visit spread a mild halo over the parsonage at Haworth, may once have been a curate. Miss Brontë should have thought of these things. She lacked the prophetic insight of the American authoress, who was so shocked to see some of our fine ladies' carriages rolling through the streets of London "with three possible inheritors of eternal glory hanging on behind."

The Professor throws no new light on the characteristics of Miss Brontë's genius; no new ground is broken; indeed, the greater part of it only retraces for us the Belgian experiences with which we are already familiar. Here is the first draft of Madame Beck, under the name of Mademoiselle Reuter; M. Pelet, the French master, is a new and excellent sketch; but we have our old friend, the teacher and intellectual subjugator of the female heart, in Mr. William Crimsworth, but mixed in his nature something of the sulky, secret-feeding affections of Lucy Snowe; in Mr. Hunsden, the educated and abnormal Yorkshire manufacturer, a crude, ill-drawn, and exaggerated, as well as badly-defined figure; and in Frances, the plain, piquant, strong-minded, fascinating little girl. But Frances, though like, is unlike. She gives a charm to the book; intellect is reconciled with a "sweet, attractive kind of grace" which Miss Brontë does not often

indulge us by delineating. Frances is a refined and softened Jane Eyre, and decidedly the most attractive female character that ever came from the pen of this author. She suffers the ordinary fate, however. Miss Brontë was a great upholder of the privileges of her sex, yet no writer in the world has ever so uniformly represented women at so great a disadvantage. They invariably fall victims to the man of strong intellect, and generally muscular frame, who lures them on with affected indifference and simulated harshness; by various ingenious trials assures himself they are worthy of him, and, when his own time has fully come, raises them with a bashaw-like air from their prostrate condition, presses them triumphantly to his heart, or seats them on his knee, as the case may be, and indulges in a condescending burst of passionate emotion. All these men are in their attachments utterly and undisguisedly selfish, and we must say we grudge them their easily won victories over the inexperienced placid little girls they lay siege to. It is not thus that generous men make their advances, or that women, worthy of the name, are won. One such case might pass; but it is Miss Brontë's standing idea of a romantic courtship.

The Professor contains some very unsparing and outspoken expressions, especially in the sketches of two or three young ladies who occupied prominent places in the Brussels school described. Miss Brontë had had no opportunity of learning what in England is considered proper to be said, and naturally, from her foreign experience, adopted some touch of continental freedom of speech. While we are on this subject, we cannot pass without notice a passage in the *Life* in strange contrast with the general tone of universal admiration:—a passage which few, we think, can have read without just indignation; and after penning which, we cannot help saying, we wonder the writer had the heart to accuse the *Quarterly* reviewer of injustice or pharisaism:

“I do not deny for myself,” says Mrs. Gaskell, with an

air worthy of Mrs. Candour, "the existence of coarseness here and there in her works, otherwise so entirely noble. I only ask those who read them to consider her life, which has been openly laid bare before them, and to say how it could be otherwise. She saw few men; and among these few were one or two with whom she had been acquainted since early girlhood, who had shown her much friendliness and kindness—through whose family she had received many pleasures—for whose intellect she had a great respect—but who talked before her, if not to her, with as little reticence as Rochester talked to Jane Eyre. Take this in connection with her poor brother's sad life, and the out-spoken people among whom she lived; remember her strong feeling of the duty of representing life as it really is, not as it ought to be; and then do her justice for all that she was, and all that she would have been had God spared her, rather than censure her because circumstances forced her to touch pitch, as it were, and by it her hand was for a moment defiled. It was but skin-deep. Every change in her life was purifying her; it hardly could raise her. Again I cry, 'If she had but lived!'"

Charlotte Brontë's works are far from being "otherwise so entirely noble;" they have defects in abundance: but there never were books more free from the stain here so quietly assumed, and so feelingly lamented as unavoidable. Rochester does *not* talk without reticence to Jane Eyre. The writer never *did* touch pitch: she might paint it; but it was in the safety of her own innocence, and we lose patience at being told, with all this array of exculpation, that she needed "purifying." Coarse materials, indeed, she too much deals with; and her own style has something rude and uncompromising in it, not always in accordance with customary ideas of what is becoming in a female writer; but it would be scarcely possible to name a writer who, in handling such difficult subject-matter, carried the reader so safely through by the unseen guardianship and unconsciously exercised influence of her stainless purity and unblemished rectitude. The conventional proprieties of speech and subject-matter she disregards, indeed; her delicacy lost some of its bloom abroad, and she may be said with justice to want

refinement ; but even that is the conventional refinement rather than the real one. It has been well said, and every reader perceives it, or ought to do so, that her plain speaking is itself the result of her purity.

What she has that jars on us often in her writings is not so much these things as a certain harshness, a love of the naked fact too unsparing, and a tendency to believe that what is attractive scarcely can be true. In the school of ladylike refined writing, true in its own sphere, enlivening, softening, and elevating, which deals gently with weak mortality, and, reversing the saying which dissuades us from breaking a butterfly on a wheel, punishes vice with a knitting-needle,—which compels into courtly phrases the swelling form and native hideousness of crime, and throws over the stern precipices and gloom-shrouded abysses of life—remorse and terror and madness—frail bridges of happy fancies and spirit-consoling hopes,—in this school we have many proficient. High in the list stands Mrs. Gaskell's own name. Her graceful fictions have power to beguile us, to cheer us, to instruct us ; and if with too silver a voice she echoes the dread undertones of the mystery of sin and suffering and death, we remember that reality has more sides than one, that each side has its truth,—and welcome the genius which instinctively turns to that aspect where beauty predominates, and whose darkest shades are error and frailties and penitence. But Miss Brontë had a different call : her feet were rougher shod to walk through both life and art ; and if she does not lead us through the dark caverns of life, at least she does not attempt to measure their depths with a silken thread, or hang pale lights of fancy in their mouths. As she passes over the lesser evils of life, she describes them in their native ruggedness ; through the depths she steals, in general, in the silence of fortitude ; and only now and then some brief cry of personal anguish rings sharp and sudden through the darkness.

If in this paper we have not swelled the number of those little paragraphs which publishers delight to cull, and which have pretty well exhausted the "combinations and permutations" of the language of eulogy, it is not because we have not a deep sense of the value of a record which raises the life of the woman so high above the triumphs of the artist, or of the beauty and the skill with which that record has been framed; but because we love to believe that authors of sense and delicacy estimate indiscriminate laudation at its true worth.

SIR E. B. LYTTON, NOVELIST, PHILOSOPHER,
AND POET.*

[April 1859.]

What will he do with it? and *My Novel* are Sir Bulwer Lytton's last and best works. This is no small distinction. It is a remarkable thing for a man to write some twenty books of imaginative fiction, and yet to retain a vigour of mind and a freshness of imagination capable of making new efforts which not only equal but surpass the first fruits of his genius. It is true that these works and *The Caxtons* are not so much his own as some of his previous writings; but perhaps they are not altogether the worse for that. Grafted on a stock of Sterne or Dickens, they flourish with a new energy, and bloom with a fairness and completeness which the scion on its own roots had never attained to. *Pelham* alone of his earlier works enters into rivalry with his last two novels; while it contrasts with them in being preëminently his own. A first work—for *Falkland* was but an abortive attempt—is almost always more characteristic than any later one of the mind of the writer. There he does not spare himself; he brings into play all his energies, is lavish of all his resources, and gives a glimpse of every facet of his mind. His powers may afterwards develope in particular directions, and the proportions originally indicated no longer be preserved; but the man himself and the cha-

* *The Novels and Romances of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton.* 20 vols. London: Routledge and Co. 1858.

The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton. 5 vols. London: Chapman and Hall.

racteristics of his genius will generally be more compendiously illustrated in the first work which really has called out his full powers than in any subsequent one. And since *Pelham* first startled and pleased the world of novel-readers with its brisk witticisms, its sharp sarcasms and lively caricatures, its clever descriptions and skilful narrative, and annoyed them by its hardness, its affectations, and its pseudo-sentiment, every subsequent work has reflected the same merits and the same defects. But the circle of merits has widened, if that of defects has not contracted. What a world of patient industry, what an indefatigable striving to make the most of his vocation, what an up-hill energy all these novels display ! Never was man more true to his calling of artist than Bulwer has been. No hasty slipshod productions have ever disgraced his powers. The love of fame is his darling passion ; but no success has ever deluded him into believing that the wreath was safely grasped, and that he might sink into indolent security.

Much of this zeal is due, no doubt, to the high estimate which the author has formed to himself of the influence and position of a novel-writer. He seems really to have persuaded himself that to write good romances is the highest achievement of the human intellect ; possibly inferior to that of producing a great epic poem, but certainly by no other effort to be rivalled in its beneficial influence, or in its claims upon the gratitude of mankind. It is natural for a man somewhat to overrate the importance of his own sphere of activity ; but it is obvious enough that Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton's judgment has been led further astray than it should have been by the fact that he has been successful in light literature, and attempted at least to write an epic poem. He exaggerates preposterously the influence of a novel-writer. He makes the wide diffusion which naturally belongs to entertaining writing, and the permanence which is inherent in printer's ink, too much the measure of the merit

of a writer. An artist in written words owes much to the materials in which he works ; and this is to be taken into account when we judge of different classes of minds by the results of their labours. It requires a far higher mind and nature altogether, faculties better balanced, wider reasoning powers, broader energies, more exact and extended knowledge, and a more capacious and active intellect, to be a great statesman than to hold any but the very highest places in the hierarchy of literature : but the name and the thoughts of even a moderately good novel-writer will be, and long remain, familiar to a large number of minds ; while the renown of the statesman is merged in new claims to attention as soon as he ceases to have a personal control over affairs. His name, indeed, may survive, but his labours perish from remembrance, as one wave yields to another, and its force is only seen in the gradual advance of the whole tide. Modern experience has proved that the power of expressing feelings and reproducing character with a truthfulness and skill greater than Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton has attained to, is any thing but a rare gift, and it is the fashion to accord it a place much higher than that to which either its rareness or its intrinsic value entitles it. And not only the artist but his work is apt to be overestimated, at least in one direction. It is the high function of art to refine and elevate the mind ; to raise us above base pleasures and low-thoughted cares ; to make Beauty familiar,—Beauty, whose gracious privilege it is that something of herself shall pass into those who habitually contemplate her. But the moving power of life—the will—art has little power to influence, and the artist mistakes his aim and arrogates too high a function when he assumes for his arbitrary creations the power to mould the heart and guide the actions of men. Realities alone have this power ; and art only so far as it reproduces actual existences, past or present, or at least is believed to do so. The life of a great man, the experiences of a

living spirit, have a powerful influence on other minds ; they excite sympathy, admiration, emulation ; the records of other men's actions control our own, the sight of their activity stimulates ours ; their patience makes patience easier to us ; their fortitude strengthens our power to bear. Is it so of the creations of the poet ? We doubt it. Sometimes, indeed, consummate genius seems to introduce us to actual lives ; but even then it has a less power over us for practical consequences than when some dauber heightens the colouring of facts. Has *Hamlet* or *Jack Sheppard* produced the greater number of actions ?

We approach every work of art in two ways—either in sympathy with the artist, or in sympathy with the subject of his art ; the two feelings mingle, and it is with a mixed admiration of the skill of the master, of the beautiful whole he has evolved, and of pity for the imploring mother, that we gaze on the statue of Niobe. But the mode in which we indulge our emotions under the influence of a work of art has, and always ought to have, in it something different from that stir of the feelings which acts immediately and powerfully upon the will. We do not say it cannot influence the will, or that it never does ; but that in most men, and most in those who are capable of the highest pleasure in art, it is a sort of movement in subordination to the æsthetic faculty, a sort of voluntary submission to emotion with an undefined consciousness that it is not pure and simple feeling we experience, but feeling excited for the sake of the pleasure there is in the movement of the feelings. We know it is not real, we know it does not demand action, that with all its vividness the poet's creation is a fantasy. When, in that scene which for appalling suspense is the masterpiece of the master-poet,—when Macbeth “ towards his design creeps like a ghost,” and his wife stands in his absence whispering her strained anticipations of the event,—our hearts, it is true, swell in our breasts, our blood stands still, we cease to breathe ; but our instinct

is not to rush forward and prevent; our excitement, however great, is one which permits us quietly to abide the issue. It is only the ignorant man who thinks Garrick in Richard the Third is a villain; and in proportion as we lose the sense of the presence of the controlling art, does the sculptor, the painter, or the poet exercise a lower influence upon us. It may be even said that the simple excitement of the feelings, unaccompanied by the sort of intellectual contemplation which mingles with their movement in every legitimate enjoyment of a work of art, is rather hurtful than beneficial. For the true end of emotion is action, and to raise emotions and let them sink undirected to their purposes is weakening to the will and exhausting to the feelings themselves. Pruriency is a degraded word; but some analogous word, applicable to the whole range of moral sentiments, would express the temper which takes pleasure in what we describe. Sentimentalism is a part of it. But art, as we have said, interposes a sort of intellectual screen between the passion and the will; and this is the true sense in which art chastens the passions. It is not that sympathy with fictitious emotions refines their general exercise in the man who has happened to read *Othello*; it is that the passion which has been raised in him while he reads is a chastened passion, one detached from its natural alliance with action, and experienced with the consciousness that it is so detached. When we consider, however, how much of our light literature seeks its hold upon the reader, not in the poetic presentment of feeling, but in the attempt to raise the actual feeling, and how vast a number of readers there are who find their pleasure in the mere emotion,—in a sort of titillation of the heart at once objectless and untransmuted by the influence of art,—we must make some deduction from the ennobling influence which the enthusiasm of Sir Bulwer Lytton somewhat too largely ascribes to the study of novels.

There are doubtless other resources within the scope

of prose fiction by which it may inform and elevate its readers. It may be made a treasury of the author's wisdom ; it may from its fidelity to nature give us fresh knowledge of the world about us. It is Sir B. Lytton's ambition to give the world the full advantages of his art in both these directions ; it is his misfortune to be but indifferently qualified for so doing. Nature has not endowed him with the power to think deeply or justly, or to see with a clear eye and reproduce with a faithful imagination. She meant him neither for a philosopher nor for a poet ; and it is to be regretted that he should always have sought to make most prominent the most defective sides of his genius. Patiently to endeavour to supply the deficiencies of our nature is doubtless laudable ; to give prominence to them is unwise. Sir Bulwer Lytton is very unfortunate in this respect. He is determined to be what he is not ; and his readers suffer for it. Even in his prefaces you hear him screaming, "*I will* be a philosopher ; *I am* a great poet ;" and his only difficulty as to those who disagree with him is as to whether they are most knave or fool. It is a standing puzzle to him to decide whether it is the ignorance or the malignity of his critics which blinds them to his merits in these respects. It is perhaps this constant straining after a false position which more than any one thing gives to his works a certain air of charlatanism. Of course we do not mean that he is destitute of imagination, or incapable of reflection ; but he is not gifted with the higher kinds or degrees of either poetic insight or poetic expression, and it is rarely indeed that his thoughts are at once clear and profound. Yet he has a great affluence of mind within certain limits, and a great skill in making the most of his resources. The water is not deep, but abundant enough ; the mischief is that the bottom is muddy, and he will always be stirring it.

Closely connected with these deficiencies is the subservience of all he writes to display. In spite of every

thing that is urged in his prefaces as to the moral and philosophical designs of his various works, it is impossible to read them without feeling that these designs yield not only to the exigencies of life-like representation, but are too often entirely subordinated to the more immediate and less defensible one of brilliancy of effect. Philosophy and poetry are not valued for their own sake ; they are machinery and materials for turning out fine writing. No man who really wished to discover truth could deal with language in the way Sir Bulwer Lytton does. It is not uncommon for him to make a grandiloquent assertion, which you may exactly transpose, and it shall be impossible to say in which form it is the more false or the more trite. We are told, for instance, in the last novel, that, "Let a king and a beggar converse freely together, and it is the beggar's fault if he does not say something which makes the king lift his hat to him." Examine such an assertion, and it is mere wind ; or, if it have meaning, it is false. "Nothing," we learn in another place, "is more polished, nothing more cold, than that wisdom which is the work of former tears, of former passions, and is formed within a musing and solitary mind." Nothing can be less true than that former tears, former passions, and musing habits, have a tendency to make wisdom cold ; rather the reverse. It depends on the other features of the character ; and this is an illustration of the nature of a great many of Bulwer's pseudo-philosophical observations. You can't say whether they are true or false ; there is a want of legitimate consequence in his assertions ; they are logically incomplete. If I say, "Men in brown clothes eat large breakfasts," or, to use language more in keeping with that of our author, "The arrayed in fuscous integuments are the devourers of the matutinal repast," I hazard nothing. I seem to say something, but in reality I say nothing. I do but give my reader a choice whether I say an untruth or a truism. So we are told in *What will he do with it?* that "Genius and Resolve have three grand

elements in common,—Patience, Hope, Concentration.” What a world of confusion of thought is displayed in that little sentence! Not one of the three qualities is necessarily inherent in either of the two things between which they are asserted to form a ground of common nature. The vanity of mind which condescends to this sort of sham thoughts is like that of the person which submits to the adornment of paste brilliants; they are not only unreal, but so very cheap. Even the particular observation in hand admits of endless multiplication. We may say, Intellect and Hesitation have three grand elements in common,—Doubts, Difficulties, and Vacillation; or, Men and Running have three grand elements in common,—Legs, Exertion, and Progression; and so on *ad infinitum*.

Bulwer is eloquent, but of that school of eloquence which values ideas as a thread on which to string glittering images and gaudy words. He is one of those many writers who are to the poet what the rhetorician is to the orator, who study the tool more than the material in which they work. He rarely speaks *out* from himself, but always *to* an audience; and you constantly cannot help feeling that he labours more to show himself than his subject to advantage. He is fond of fine language for its own sake; his style is not polished, but French-varnished; does not give the highest effect to the sense which lies under it, but conceals it beneath an opaque glitter. Words indeed have a value and a power of their own; they are more than the representatives of things, they are themselves things; and the deepest mastery of expressional power in the poet is shown in bending their attributes as well as their meaning to his purpose. But still, of course their only proper value to the writer is as a medium of expression. There is a hollowness as well as a feebleness in employing them for ornamentation; there is singleness of purpose as well as refinement of taste and accuracy of mind in using them simply as they most exactly express our meaning. Fine writing is one

of the most prominent defects in Sir Bulwer Lytton's writings; where one word would express his idea most exactly, he uses another because it is more uncommon, more pretentious, more goodlooking. He will not condescend to call things by their proper names; and his euphuisms must excite many a smile among his readers. When a man has dined we are told, "the inmate of the apartment had passed the hour of the principal repast;" a canary-bird's cage is "the slender prison of one of those golden wanderers of the Canary isles which bear to our colder land some of the gentlest music of their skies and zephyrs;" men wear dressing-robes instead of gowns, walk out with staffs instead of sticks, &c. &c. Sometimes a little of Sir Edward's hard-worked scholarship is used to add to the effect: we are told of a beech-tree "shaming the pavilion of Tityrus;" a man with ancestors is called a "eupatrid;" and news are brought by "a messenger, or ἄγγελος." Platitudes dressed out in a pretentious array of words are a provoking substitute for thought. A novel is not required to be full of original reflections—they are constantly very much in the way there; but we have a claim, at any rate, to be spared the tawdry imitation of them. You are not bound to give your friends claret; but it is degrading to you and them to insist on their drinking 24s. St. Julien out of a large cut-glass decanter. He tells us by the aid of those Capital Letters with which he makes fine words finer still, "how much of aid and solace the Herd of Men derive from the Everlasting Genius of the Few." That men of Genius are few, and the source of aid and solace to many, is true or trite enough; but it is not in respect of their fewness that they minister to the world; nor is it the "Herd," but those above the "Herd," that genius most helps to sustain. But it matters little for the exact meaning; who can care for the wine with such large ornamental knobs on the decanter? It is not very often, indeed, that Sir Bulwer Lytton says things absolutely without a meaning;

but that a man who cannot claim the privilege of stupidity should ever do so is sufficient to convict him of a failing in the conscientious expression of thought; and the proof that a writer is not saying something, but making up a saying, is generally to be found in the false application of single words rather than in the faulty turn of sentences.

The want of accuracy, which is so obvious in Bulwer's writings in the province of thought, affects also his imagination. As a simple desire to ascertain truth is all-important to philosophy, so the power to perceive and represent things truly is the first requirement in the poet. Truthfulness of detail is of the essence of poetry. Not that detail itself is essential. A great regard to minutiae in an artist is often justly spoken of with contempt. It is so when a man occupies himself with elaborating details of the matter he has in hand which are not of its essence, or immediately pertinent to it; but where a detail creates a true distinction, the minuter it is the more genius displays itself in truly apprehending it and fully using it. Moreover, accuracy is most easily measured in details; and he who, whether in painting or poetry, is found incapable of dealing truthfully with minutiae, may justly be suspected of unfaithfulness to nature in his larger designs, which are less open to criticism. An imaginative writer is not bound to know every thing, but he is bound to be right in what he professes to know. Bulwer is not bound to be acquainted with the aspects of Nature, or the seasons of flowering plants; he might without disgrace admit himself ignorant of the habits of animals; his observation has taken another and a higher turn: but he has no right to affect a knowledge he does not possess, and make the ludicrous mistakes he does on these subjects. In the preface to *Eugene Aram* he even calls attention to the skill by which he has indicated the progress of the story by his descriptions of the seasons, and invites us in June to the grassy banks of a stream where grow the ivy-leaved

bell-flower (whatever that may be), and where on the contiguous hedge are to be seen the luxuriant flowers of the white bryony. The poppy adorns the hedge in the last days of autumn, and the sunflower and crocus are in full glory at one time. Toads have red eyes, which you can see shining in the grass as you walk; owls flap heavily through the air, and little boys invest in large double geraniums. In *Harold* we are introduced to half-a-dozen handmaids "spinning," of which operation the author entertains the most confused ideas: the eye of the mistress "fell upon the row of silent maids, each at her rapid, noiseless, stealthy work. 'Ho!' said she, her cold and haughty eye gleaming as she spoke, 'yesterday they brought home the summer, to-day ye aid to bring home the winter. Weave well, heed well warp and woof; Skulda is amongst ye, and her pale fingers guide the web.'" From this, though with but vague impressions as to how Skulda was employing herself, one would think the maids were weaving, not spinning; but directly after we learn that their "spindles revolved."

But far deeper than to such trifles pierce the deficiencies of the author's imagination. They are felt throughout his writings. He is at once brilliant and indistinct. He has in its most exaggerated form what is one of the common attributes of second-class genius,—the power to see things vividly and yet not truly. He can neither grasp nor represent any thing in the fullness of its individuality. He abides in salient distinctions, and conceives that a bright light thrown on these will compensate for the finer lines of demarcation being left in darkness. His characters stand boldly out; they excite attention and interest, but they will not bear close examination; if you press too near them, they elude you, all the subtler traits lose distinctness, and you find that what they have of reality is commonplace. They are almost invariably self-consistent, to a certain extent, and individual; but they have the air of manufactures, and are

all made out of the same sort of wood. You see that the author does not conceive a character ; he makes it up, just as he makes up a story. He never, except in certain limited directions, penetrates into the recesses of another mind or heart. He never paints the complex reality. He has none of the poetic power of flashing a light upon the mysteries of human hidden life, the life within the man's own breast. His way of representing a man is to elaborate one or two obvious aspects of character. On these he dwells, and draws them over and over again in every new phase of circumstance in which his subject is represented, accompanying it generally with a repetition of the personal description ; and, stroke after stroke, he hammers into you what such a person resembles, and what the description stands for ; but, like the moon, his figures always present one side to you, and he seems to think that to paint a part twice is as good as to paint the whole once. These defects are not so obvious as one reads. The skilful arrangement, the lively movement, the fullness and vigour of action, the spirit and point of the conversation,—these and other great merits in the novelist carry you easily and pleasantly to the end. It is only when you lay the book down that you become conscious that you have been living in an unreal and artificial world. It is like coming out of a papier-mâché manufactory : what fine things you have seen ! how ingenious ! how glossy ! how ornate ! but, after all, one does not care about papier-mâché, however brilliant ; one does not even remember the best patterns as one does a good picture. Those are not real men and women one has been amongst for these three volumes ; they are only admirable imitations of men and women, with “Sir Bulwer Lytton *hoc fecit*” written all over them. The author is “too much with us.” There is an egotism in the genius of Bulwer that always makes itself felt ; it is not so much that in his works he thrusts himself *in propria personâ* upon you, it is that he never leaves you ; he makes his

presence uncomfortably felt in every page ; you see the showman at every turn moving his puppets and giving voice to their dialogues. Partly it is that he *cannot* escape from himself, that he cannot by force of imagination become another. Hence his personal creations are never themselves in all they say and do. He describes them admirably, he retains their general features, they are separate enough in all their marked outlines ; but he has not that mastery of them—that possession by them, we should rather say—which enables a dramatic writer insensibly to colour with individual hues every word which comes out of the mouths of the beings with which his imagination is occupied.

Thus it is that, in spite of his great variety of outlines, a monotonous tone runs through all Bulwer's characters as soon as they begin to speak for themselves. The style, the rhythm, the position from which things are looked at,—all have a common element. The Bulwerian cast of thought and phraseology break out on them all like a rash, often to their great disfigurement. There is a sameness both in the innermost germ of his characters, and in the farthest details by which they are expressed ; and this is to be expected, for a man expresses himself most individually, and throws most light on his character, by his minutest and most habitual words and actions. Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton's characters resemble one another in expression because they are based on a common foundation. The author's power, great and various as it is, cannot pass beyond the art of collecting certain attributes of character, and calling them a person ; and he always makes such person speak as he himself would speak had he those qualities. We have Sir Edward as man of fashion, Sir Edward as statesman, Sir Edward as highwayman, as philosopher, as squire, as young lady, as old lady, as mendicant, philanthropist, preacher, soldier, Christian, ruffian, poisoner, poet. Amazing is the fertility of mind and fancy ; wonderful the command of

varied incident, of the forms and modes of various kinds of life ; he is a very Proteus in the art of external self-transformation ; but his works, taken together, show that in all his books a set of characters are again and again reproduced, always with certain defined differences. His variety is great, but his range is small. Even Harley l'Estrange, the most original, the most essentially distinct in conception, of all his pictures, betrays his common origin as soon as he begins to be developed beyond a sketch and to occupy some space upon the stage. Godolphin is the most thoroughly executed of his characters ; perhaps because he is drawn more directly from some obvious phase of the author's character. Nobody thinks Hazeldean a real English squire ; you say it is like, but Sir Bulwer Lytton in top-boots and a cut-away green coat does not really deceive you for a moment. He has got himself up capitally as a country parson in Dale, and it is only when he begins to talk that we recognise the old familiar face. Riccabocca is so good that he is almost an exception to the rule ; but in Leonard the colours are only well washed out and the hair brushed straight down ; all the rest are old friends with a difference. Waif, in the last novel, is well conceived and well described ; but he, like all the rest, can only speak himself in certain obvious characteristics.

There is a complete absence in Bulwer of the fundamental, the essential part of dramatic genius. He is clever in the use of dramatic forms, and skilful in employing them as the vehicle of his narrative, and in the exposition of his characters, as far as he does expound them ; but there is a limit he never passes. He has none of that wonderful faculty by which special individuality and the minutest traits and subtlest distinctions of character are betrayed, as in living men they are betrayed, by distinctions of expression and language too fine to be analysed. If he had possessed this power, he might have been a great dramatic writer ; for he has all the other

qualities which go to ensure success in that the most difficult field of imaginative literature, and he has shown himself a very clever and successful playwright. But read his plays (we have read them), and it is a matter of surprise that he should have condescended to write them, so insipid are the characters, so flatulent the eloquence, so conventional and so maudlin the pathos. The wit is the best ; but less good in his plays than his novels. In the language of immediate action, however, Bulwer excels. In what men do, and in that part of their language which accompanies and may be said to be part of their actions, he delineates them characteristically and well ; and no one will question that, both in his conceptions and in his execution, he masters those more obvious traits which are developed in a man's outward conduct. He succeeds best, therefore, when he delineates men of action, and especially of intrigue. Vargrave may be a less probable conception than Maltravers, but he is drawn with a sharp clear stroke, while the lines in the latter are patched and wavering. It may be said this is incidental to the difference of character ; but this is to confound the author with the subject. Hamlet may be irresolute, but there is no uncertainty in the lines with which Hamlet is drawn.

Sir Bulwer Lytton claims to have made a new discovery in the art of writing historical romances. Like the bold palæontologists of our day, he professes to cover the true skeleton of the past with the full form it once bore in the present ; to take the facts and the outlines of characters as we find them, and to fill up the details from the resources of his imagination : he thinks you thus gain much in accuracy over those writers who distort facts more or less to suit the exigencies of their art. We doubt this. So far as historical romances go to form the historical ideas of readers, they do so by the general impressions the whole story conveys, and not by the reader's attention to the thread of historic incident on which they are strung. To pursue the simile we have

just used, the unenlightened spectator who gazes on a reconstructed ichthyosaurus carries away the idea of a strangely-shaped and disagreeable-looking beast ; he does not examine whether it has got its own thigh-bone, or whether the tail is rightly jointed ; it is the general aspect which stamps itself on his mind ; and if you have all the bones right and dress them up wrong, you cannot fail to produce a false impression. And who shall be so bold as to say it is within the resources of his knowledge or imagination truly to fill up the skeleton outlines of history ?

It is better surely that the province of the historian and the poet should be kept apart. They must of course overlap one another to a certain extent. The historian finds it necessary to give life to his pictures by completing them to some extent from the resources of his own mind ; and the poet seeks food for his imagination in the truths of life. The James II. and the William III. of Macaulay are, we know, not exactly the men themselves, but the image of them the author has formed to himself ; and the Achilles of Homer and the Tiberius of Jonson are raised upon a basis of actual fact. But great poets have used history as furnishing materials to the imagination ; they have not pretended that imagination can fill up according to its very reality the outline of facts. They have called what they write poems, not histories. More than a certain amount of detail and a certain amount of truth as to past facts are absolutely incapable of being combined by any genius less than omniscient. Bulwer demands from us that we should look on *Harold*, *Rienzi*, and *The Last of the Barons*, not so much as efforts of the fancy as representations of reality. It is true he has great resources for works of this kind. No man handles facts with greater mastery, and good judges have pronounced him accurate in his narratives, as he certainly is painstaking in his investigations. But the deficiencies of poetic insight of which we have been speaking render

him perhaps one of the last men of equal intellectual power who should undertake to reproduce the full body of past life, and to bring before us the images of men, not only as they seemed and acted, but as they were in their own hearts and consciences. He gives a vivid picture of social conditions, of manners, of events; so far as external resources are available, he commands attention and even admiration: but when thrown on himself, the limitation and egotism of his genius become painfully apparent, and more so in these historical romances than in those in which he has irresponsible power over the personages of his own creation.

It is easier to judge of a false interpretation than of a faulty conception. We reconcile ourselves as we best may to the lucubrations of Devereux and Maltravers; but we feel indignant when Harold is set before us staggering under the heaped verbiage and tawdry philosophy of Sir E. B. Lytton. All veil of illusion is torn away for ever when Richard Duke of Gloucester mutters, "So perishes the race of iron. Low lies the last baron who could control the throne and command the people. The age of force expires with knighthood and deeds of arms. And over this dead great man I see the new cycle dawn." Or when Rienzi, disgusted with the Romans, cries, "And with such tools the living race of Europe and misjudging posterity will deem that the workman is to shape out the ideal and the perfect." In history more than elsewhere we are annoyed by the struggle between egotism and dramatic power, and smile to see how at every turn the minds of other times and other lands are used as the mouthpieces of the author's favourite ideas and forms of speech. In life his Saxons, his Italians, his Greeks and Egyptians once talked for purposes of their own; it is now their province to talk so as to show how poetically and profoundly Sir E. B. Lytton can write. "Does the ground," says a Saxon in the eleventh century, who is represented as worldly-wise above his fellows,—“does

the ground reject the germs of the sower" (he means the seed he sows, not his own embryo; but germ is more poetical than seeds, and would be preferred by a worldly-wise Saxon),

"or the young heart the first lessons of wonder and awe? Since then, Prophetess, Night hath been my comrade, and Death my familiar. Rememberest thou again the hour when, stealing, a boy, from Harold's house in his absence—the night ere I left my land—I stood on this mound by thy side? Then did I tell thee that the sole soft thought that relieved the bitterness of my soul, when all the rest of my kinsfolk seemed to behold in me but the heir of Sweyn, the outlaw and homicide, was the love that I bore to Harold; but that that love itself was mournful and bodeful as the hwata* of distant sorrow. And thou didst take me, O Prophetess, to thy bosom, and thy cold kiss touched my lips and my brow; and there, beside this altar and grave-mound, by leaf and by water, by staff and by song, thou didst bid me take comfort; for that as the mouse gnawed the toils of the lion, so the exile obscure should deliver from peril the pride and the prince of my House—that from that hour with the skein of his fate should mine be entwined; and his fate was that of kings and of kingdoms. And then, when the joy flushed my cheek, and methought youth came back in warmth to the night of my soul—then, Hilda, I asked thee if my life would be spared till I had redeemed the name of my father. Thy seid-staff passed over the leaves that, burning with fire-sparks, symbolled the life of the man, and from the third leaf the flame leaped up and died; and again a voice from thy breast, hollow, as if borne from a hill-top afar, made answer, 'At thine entrance to manhood life bursts into blaze, and shrivels up into ashes.' So I knew that the doom of the infant still weighed unannealed on the years of the man; and I come here to my native land as to glory and the grave. But," said the young man, with a wild enthusiasm, "still with mine links the fate which is loftiest in England; and the rill and the river shall rush in one to the Terrible Sea."

Listen how Harold and Haco converse in an afternoon's ride. "Ride with me, then," says Harold; "but

* Omen.

pardon a dull companion ; for when the soul communes with itself, the lip is silent." "True," said Haco ; "and I am no babbler. Three things are ever silent,—thought, destiny, and the grave." This system of lugging in a pseudo-poetico-philosophical reflection in the train of the simplest observations is not uncommon in Bulwer, but he is an exceptional human being in this mode of expressing his thoughts. There is no age or country in which men have habitually heightened their discourse with this sort of seasoning. Even in the author's own day, we don't hear people say, "Good morning, for ere the fast is broken, salutation is sweet ;" or, "No more, thank you, I am no great eater. Three things have no appetite,—moral reflections, chance, and the resurrection of the dead."

When you read *Quentin Durward*, or *Old Mortality*, or *Woodstock*, you don't ask yourself, Is this history ? but you are in some danger of quietly taking a false impression. So easy, so natural, so life-like is the presentation, that you can scarcely escape its charm. Sir Walter Scott may lead your impressions astray, Sir Bulwer Lytton prevents their being true ; but he does not leave any permanently false ideas, his figures are so obviously unreal that they do not long dwell in the memory or the imagination. They are human hypotheses which you accept for the sake of the story, and discard when you have finished it. If there be an exception to this, it is in the case of *Rienzi*, incomparably the best of Bulwer's historical romances. The characters both of *Rienzi* and *Montreal* are those with which he is best fitted to deal ; but those who recall their impressions of this novel will find they have gathered no image of the real man *Rienzi*. Description wanders round and round him, but never settles on him. The events among which he moved, these are clearly and vividly stamped : ambition and love find a voice powerful, though often exaggerated in tone and meretricious in colouring ; the subordinate persons

are sketched-in with an effective and experienced touch. But ask yourself, Has the writer ever penetrated to the real nature of his hero, or is it indeed the complete image of any real man with which he presents you?—and you are forced to confess it is not; but only a clever conglomeration of attributes, having all the life-likeness that can be obtained from the display of qualities in appropriate action, but not that higher one which great imaginations alone possess the power to set forth, because they alone have the power to pierce to the nature upon which it is framed. Bulwer does not divine a character, he ex-cogitates it.

Nor in these historical romances is his singleness of purpose more to be trusted than his genius. It is plain that he is treating his historic personages as material; that he is not even seeking to represent them as they most truly were, but that this aim is subordinate to another, that of making them effective. They are for him such stuff as three-volume novels destined to be popular are made of, and their little life is rounded off into the Bulwerian philosophy.

In the dedicatory epistle to *The Last of the Barons*, after a brief enumeration of his *dramatis personæ*, we are told, "Such characters as I have here alluded to seemed then to me, in meditating the treatment of the high and brilliant subject which your eloquence animated me to attempt, the proper Representatives of the multi-form Truths which the time of Warwick the King-maker affords to our interests and suggests for our instruction." Such a confession at once destroys confidence in his historical trustworthiness. You may if you choose, poor work as it is, create men to represent ideas; but no writer is to be trusted in using the persons of history as the "representatives of truths." They will require much docking and fining and altering before they will fit into our philosophy; and almost unconsciously the operator moulds them from what they really were into what they

ought to have been, to suit his purpose. The fact is, Sir Bulwer Lytton's ambition urges him to an impossible task. He cannot bear that his historical romances should fail to unite the most diverse claims upon our admiration. They are to be true history, exciting romance, and profound philosophy. Nor are these difficult subjects of combination arranged in that defined order of subordination which alone could make their coexistence tolerable. Each struggles for predominance, and each in turn is permitted to possess it; so that every work is in different parts one of these three things at the expense of the other two. *Harold* is, more than any other of his works, marked with this vacillation of purpose; it extends to the very style, with its petty pedantries and the sharp contrasts between an occasional imitation of the style of the old chroniclers and the inflated Latin periods more natural to the author.

There are other works, however, of Sir E. B. Lytton, in which the philosophical element, if we may so call it, occupies a more prominent place. He is fond, indeed, of assigning to all his works some definite central idea or moral lesson, of which the story itself is the development. These appear to more advantage when we are told about them in the prefaces than when we attempt to discover them in the works themselves. It taxes our credulity to be told that *Paul Clifford* is a disquisition on the philosophy of punishment; that *Godolphin* traces the deterioration of character by a career of self-indulgence; or that *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice* develop the education of circumstances and the career of genius. That the author has had some such aims, we do not dispute; but his mind is too little capable of connected and permanent moral convictions to fit him to use his genius for invention as the machinery for developing and expressing moral ideas. His readers must always regret that the free play of powers more natural to him is impaired by the constant strain to make them ancillary to ideas

with which, after all, the limits of the author's nature make it impossible for him adequately to deal. Had Sir Bulwer Lytton confined his aspirations to the entertainment of his fellow-creatures by vivid pictures of social life, display of character, and narrative of events and actions, he would have taken far higher rank as a novelist, and would have lost nothing by resigning all claim to the character of a profound moral instructor and the expounder of valuable truths. We are aware that the author does not agree with us. We have read with attention in his prefaces the assertions that the intellectual mould in which many of his fictions are cast raises them above the comprehension of most readers, and that not to admire is simply not to understand. Stimulated by the boldness of his claims, we have read his works with attention ; and we cannot conceal our conviction that the disappointment of all readers in this direction will be proportioned to the closeness and patience with which they scrutinise the real matter those works contain, and that their popularity is always likely to remain greatest with those who are satisfied to regard them as exciting tales of life and passion.

The author, though deeply impressed with the necessity of being a moral writer, always seems desirous of attaining his end at as little expenditure of connected thought as possible. His fondness for what he oddly calls types seems to spring from this source. He is fond of telling you that certain characters and certain lives are "the types" of certain abstract moral qualities, and he seems to think that to say this is to enforce a moral conclusion. The disappointment of the reader is great when he finds, on taking the pains to examine, that all that is meant is, that the moral quality in question forms a part of the character, and is to a certain extent brought into action in the life ; but that there is no sense in which that special quality rather than half a dozen others is exemplified in that life and character. Thus in *Harold*

we read that "if the leading agencies of Harold's memorable career might be as it were symbolised and allegorised by the living beings with which it was connected, as Edith was the representative of stainless Truth, as Gurth was the type of dauntless Duty" (imagine a courageous obligation!), "as Hilda embodied aspiring Imagination, so Haco seemed the personation of worldly wisdom." What a strange purposelessness there seems in culling out these qualities, calling them "the Agencies" of one man's career, and allegorising them in three other persons, to each of whom any reader of the book will be at no loss to ascribe half a dozen equally distinctive traits! In reality, Bulwer's imagination, whatever its other defects, is too broad and active for this narrow identification of human beings with single attributes.

A great regard for types is always evidence of some shallowness of mind. Those who are deeply impressed with the richness and infinite variety of created things, who are sensible to the fine links which unite, the subtle and melting distinctions which separate, who feel into what an intermingling and delicate web of existence the lives of men are interwoven,—such men are shy of "types." To invent an allegory is a very different thing from discovering or developing a type. If a type is to be true, it must embody in a single individual form the universal and essential characteristics of that of which it is the type; and it must remain true to these in all the aspects in which it is displayed. You cannot make so complex a thing as a human being the type of an abstract quality without either representing the man partially or the quality confusedly. You may invent a sort of incarnation of a quality. Hebe, with ever-blooming charms, may be made the type of youth. You may take a living thing, an animal, or even a man, and show it in some special aspect as the type of a quality; you may say a lion is the type of generosity, a Bacon the type of the investigative mind: but you can't write the true natural his-

tory of the lion, or the true biography of Bacon, and at the same time make these descriptions mere amplifications of the typical character assigned to the subjects of them. The attempt to do so must necessarily lead to falseness and incompleteness. You cannot really combine allegory and exhibition of character. It is always a source of discomfort to the reader when an author attempts to do so. We are always much happier when he allows things to be what they are. What a plague it would be if Sir Walter Scott were infected with a *penchant* for types! if he were always telling us, for instance, that the old knight in *Woodstock* was the type of loyalty, and informed us in a preface that because he had told us so *Woodstock* was an intellectual romance!

In reality, the inventions of Bulwer are too real and life-like to serve as mere embodiments of ideas or vehicles of "moral suggestions." When once warmed to the human interests of his personages, he soon overwhelms their assigned typical character. But he is very unwilling to allow this; he clings to his inner meanings; he cannot forego the credit of being profound as well as exciting and entertaining; and the resources he has recourse to when, by adherence to the exigencies of his story and characters, he has involved his types in inextricable confusion, have in them something not easily reconcilable with candour and good sense. He throws the burden on the reader; he hints that what seems nonsense is only the depth of hidden wisdom. He won't quite commit himself to saying he himself has a meaning in it all; but he says to his readers, You must all set to work and look for a meaning: I dare say you will all find different ones; but that you must expect, for the meaning is "a mystery." Now, even if we were sure our author had a concealed meaning, we should scarcely trouble ourselves to seek it carefully through a work of fiction unless we had some guarantee in his other writings that the meaning when found would repay us for the search. Many

men may think it worth their while to solve the enigma of Goethe's *Helena*: but we cannot help smiling when Sir Edward, with his somewhat arrogant and yet uneasy egotism, invites us to a similar task. Certainly those who are most familiar with the sort of thought that his writings in general display will be the least anxious to lend their efforts to the solution of such a work as *Zanoni*. We are far from forming a low estimate of the intellectual powers of the author of *Ernest Maltravers* and *My Novel*: his observations both on social and political life are acute; his generalisations from historical and political experience sensible, and sometimes far-sighted; his direct moral conclusions are just; his knowledge in the different directions in which his branch of art demands it, is up to the mark, though it sometimes bears traces of having been got up for the occasion: but active, vigorous, and well in hand as his mind is, it is commonplace in the direction of thought; and wherever, as is too often the case, he labours to be profound, he will be found either dealing with elaborately-decorated platitudes, or in a hopeless confusion of ideas concealed in pretentious verbiage. There is little temptation, then, to attack the "mysteries" of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton's concoction; it is not pleasant to spend time in exploring a perplexed road which leads to nowhere in particular.

The note on *Zanoni* is eminently characteristic of the value which he appears to attach to the "typical side of art." In it he says:

"The curiosity which *Zanoni* has excited among those who think it worth while to dive into the subtler meanings they believe it intended to convey, may excuse me in adding a few words, not in explanation of its mysteries, but upon the principles which permit them. *Zanoni* is not, as some have supposed, an allegory; but beneath the narrative it relates, *typical* meanings are concealed. It is to be regarded in two characters, distinct yet harmonious—1st, that of the simple and objective fiction, in which (once granting the license of the author to select a subject which is, or appears to be, preter-

natural) the reader judges the writer by the usual canons—viz. by the consistency of his characters under such admitted circumstances, the interest of his story, and the coherence of his plot;—of the work regarded in this view, it is not my intention to say any thing, whether in exposition of the design, or in defence of the execution. No typical meanings (which, in plain terms, are but moral suggestions, more or less numerous, more or less subtle) can afford just excuse to a writer of fiction for the errors he should avoid in the most ordinary novel. We have no right to expect the most ingenious reader to search for the inner meaning, if the obvious course of the narrative be tedious and displeasing. It is, on the contrary, in proportion as we are satisfied with the objective sense of a work of imagination, that we are inclined to search into its depths for the more secret intentions of the author. Were we not so divinely charmed with *Faust*, and *Hamlet*, and *Prometheus*,—so ardently carried on by the interest of the story told to the common understanding, we should trouble ourselves little with the types in each which all of us can detect—none of us can elucidate;—none elucidate, for the essence of type is mystery. We behold the figure, we cannot lift the veil. The Author himself is not called upon to explain what he designed. An Allegory is a personation of distinct and definite things—Virtues or Qualities—and the Key can be given easily; but a writer who conveys typical meanings may express them in myriads. He cannot disentangle all the hues which commingle into the light he seeks to cast upon truth; and therefore the great masters of this enchanted soil—Fairy land of Fairy land—Poetry embedded beneath Poetry—wisely leave to each mind to guess at such truths as best please or instruct it. To have asked Goethe to explain the *Faust* would have entailed as complex and puzzling an answer as to have asked Mephistopheles to explain what is beneath the earth we tread on. The stores beneath may differ for every passenger; each step may require a new description; and what is treasure to the geologist may be rubbish to the miner. Six worlds may lie under a sod, but to the common eye they are but six layers of stone.”

That disingenuousness of which we have spoken shows itself in the whole tenor of this note. The writer tacitly claims credit for some very subtle and profound meaning embodied in his fiction, and yet declines committing himself to having any meaning at all. It is, in fact, an appeal to the reader to make a meaning, and call it the author's.

Throughout the writer seems to be confounding two very different sources of suggestion, which are to be found in all imaginative writers. The creations of every great poet will suggest to us many of the same truths as would have been suggested to us by the realities of which his figments are the representatives; and (the instincts of his genius producing on his pages a faithful image of the realities of the world) his work may possess a mine of wealth which he has not of set purpose placed there, and is possibly entirely unconscious of, and from which each reader may gather according to his own powers of insight. If the poet truly portray men, you may learn from him something of men, just as you would learn it from the living. *Hamlet* may cast a new light on the workings of the human intellect in other directions than those in which the poet conceived them, and we may learn things from him which Shakspeare never intended; but Shakspeare can no more claim to be the philosophical discoverer and setter-forth of these truths than a painter could claim to be a botanist because he added to botanical knowledge by the correct drawing of a new plant. On the other hand, the poet undoubtedly may expressly embody certain truths, and make his inventions the vehicle of moral suggestions; but however subtle and profound these may be, there is no "mystery" about them, nor can he make these suggestions without understanding what he is doing. If a work of art be meant as a typical embodiment of certain ideas, every pains should be taken to make its meaning transparent and its purpose clear; and few things can degrade art more than to make it a cloak for a riddle.

One thing, however, is worse; and that is, to make it a riddle without an answer. The story of *Zanoni* is full of the author's peculiar power; the supernatural elements are handled with great address; it would scarcely be possible in some respects to speak too highly of the conception and execution of parts of it: but the constant hints of some unspeakable depths of inner meaning; the trite-

ness and confusion of all of that inner meaning which is graciously exposed to us; the absence of any indications that there really is any clear connected explanation; and the affectation of solemnity and reserve in this note, the "I could an if I would, and yet I know not" air,—give one the feeling that *Zanoni*, with its vast blowing of esoteric trumpets and constant invitations to step inside and see the real meaning of the show, is in reality a sham; and that the "mystery" bears the same relation to the brilliant story, that the decayed old lion and half-dozen mangy monkeys inside a travelling menagerie bear to the lively representation of wild-beasts in every attitude which hangs outside. The truth we apprehend is, that Bulwer had a meaning, which we may call allegorical or typical; that it was never very clear, and that the exigencies of the story distorted it still more: but the language of *Zanoni* is so very fine, that he *feels*, as the women say, that it must contain some depths of meaning; he welcomes the idea that in the recesses of his eloquence his genius may have laid eggs of gold unknown to himself, and he cackles thus loudly to the world to come and look for them. But the world must first be satisfied that the eggs are there; and secondly, that they are of gold. The success of the distinguished writer whose explanation the author has so far accepted as to print with his tale, is certainly not such as to lead many others into the same field of inquiry.

Bulwer has been accused of seeking an unwholesome source of interest in criminal life and passions. If this charge against some of his novels has been pushed further than is reasonable, it is owing in some measure to the exaggerated pretensions to purity and elevation of moral design which have been put forward by the author. He was at the pains some years ago to write a pamphlet to justify his choice of subjects in his three novels of *Paul Clifford*, *Eugene Aram*, and *Lucretia* (the only ones to which this accusation directly applies), and to defend his

treatment. The subject is skilfully and forcibly, but not very thoroughly, handled. We have no space here to discuss the grounds and limitations of the dealing of art with criminal subject-matter ; in part, no doubt, the same considerations which forbid us to expect too much from mere sympathy with the expressions of the higher feelings and sentiments evoked by art are those which justify its use of the lower ones. But it is difficult to go along with an author in his indiscriminating claim to treat the every-day crimes of modern life as the legitimate subjects of imaginative fiction ; nor does he meet the obvious objections to thus dealing with them by saying that we are daily brought in contact with the realities. The very question is, What are the limits of art in the reproduction of realities ? There are many things in life, the most repulsive and degrading, which we cannot avoid ; but this is no argument for voluntarily reproducing them, and giving them that hold upon us which they derive from being seen through a vivid imagination. We willingly admit that Bulwer's genius particularly qualifies him to interpose the screen of art before his deformed subject-matter ; but here, as elsewhere, the love of effect predominates over all other considerations. *Lucretia* may be said to be the only one of Bulwer's novels in which crime is made the main source of interest ; and skilfully managed as it is, those who read it can scarcely escape the conviction that it is degrading to be brought into this close contact with revolting crime for the sake of the fine writing and exciting scenes of action which can be spun out of it. And though it may be true, as Bulwer urges, that art can enforce a deeper moral than a common mind can gather from realities, yet it is certain that he himself is but ill-qualified to pluck the flower out of this nettle. He has little or no power to depict the influence of criminal indulgence on the human heart ; he does not bring that knowledge, that insight, which alone can give dignity to such a theme. He believes he does, and he is there-

fore fairly justified to himself. You cannot blame him for writing *Lucretia*, conceiving, as he evidently does, that it is full of deep wisdom, and unravels the mysteries of men's temptations and of God's judgments. But it is not so. It is at best a mere intellectual study, and by no means a profound one. The criminal interest in the *Children of Night* is simply the vivid personal description and lively history of the actions of three murderers. It is ably done; it is relieved happily enough by the less revolting characters and brighter aspects of the story; but it has in it nothing of that profound insight into the sources of crime, none of that *truth*, to be brief, which alone can reconcile us to such a picture.

And at the same time the author seeks to create a fictitious interest, opposed to his own and all true principles of art, by reminding us constantly that the story has a basis in actual fact. This is worst of all. If a story like this is true, we then confine ourselves to what we know. In real facts some grain of golden experience lies always hidden for those whose business it may be to search for it. But when an artist like Bulwer lays hold of it, alters it to his purpose, furbishes it up, adorns it with poetical language, rhetorical gauds, and a bright depicting fancy, and thinks he has done the cause of goodness service by the not less than savage cruelty with which he dilates on the doom which overtakes the guilty lives he pictures,—what can we really learn from a medley where the reality is inextricably mixed with false lights thrown in to make a glittering picture? If a poet can draw a guilty career and a sinful heart *truly*, he may teach us much. But this needs two things; the insight to perceive the truth, and a singleness of purpose to lay it bare. If a writer have these, he may create truth-teaching phantasms out of the resources of his imagination; if he have them not, to base his creations on a substructure of reality is but to introduce an element of additional perplexity, and to give a spur to false excite-

ment. In *Eugene Aram*, as in *Lucretia*, a nucleus of reality is made a false source of interest. Without it the *Eugene Aram* of Bulwer would scarcely command the perusal of any one more exigent than a schoolboy. It rings hollow and artificial from beginning to end. It can scarcely be said to touch on real human life. It is a sort of pasteboard existence to which you are introduced, so hard and stiff and thin are all the figures. But it is with the morality of the story we are now occupied. No doubt the sudden descent of cultivated intellect, and an apparently gentle and elevated nature, into foul crime is a phenomenon which startles men strangely, which lays hold on something deeper than our curiosity, and which may well challenge the keenest inquisition of both the philosopher and the poet. But the only way in which the poet can turn it to a moral purpose, is to find a moral solution of it. Assuredly in that nature there was some moral canker, which had eaten wide and deep below the surface before so sudden a collapse could have taken place. To deem otherwise is to upset the foundations of the world. To tell us that a man not only apparently but really wise, humane, conscientious, and pious, may step out any dark night with a bludgeon and murder a passer-by for the sake of his purse, is to dissolve the faith which is the fundamental cement of human society. There are but two explanations of such an event : either

“Rank corruption, mining all within,
Corrupts unseen;”

or insanity, in some form or other, has unhinged the nature. A true poet, dealing with such a subject, would find its deepest demands upon him in those mysteries of human self-deception which would at once explain it and derive light from it. Bulwer does, indeed, aim at something of this kind ; but his treatment is shallow and artificial. He has heard of a Spanish priest who committed a somewhat similar crime, and grafts the jesuitical so-

phistries proper to such a nature and education on the English scholar. With the real difficulties of the intricate phenomenon before him he is utterly incapable of dealing; and the very fact of his venturing, with the resources at his command, on such a subject, shows that the moral aspect of the thing has no real hold upon him, but that he is mainly anxious to get good materials for a novel out of it. What he wants is a romantic figure of a man involved in mystery, whom it shall be woe to the fair-haired sister to love, who shall attract admiration and commiseration, and whose end shall be as the end of a blue-light on the stage. *Eugene Aram* may pass muster as a melodrama, and *Lucretia* as an exciting story for those whose tastes are not very refined; and all may claim to be written with a decent regard for propriety, and with a desire to avoid the mischievous handling of doubtful materials. But when the author invites us to enter them as treasure-houses of wisdom, and seems, when in later life he opens the door afresh with a new preface, to fall back himself astonished at the dignity of the structure and the wealth amassed in it, no one can help expressing some little disappointment when he comes to scrutinise for himself the subject-matter of so profound and doubtless so genuine an admiration.

As a constructive artist Bulwer is indisputably great; and his works stand in this respect above those of every contemporary, we may almost say every rival. *Tom Jones* is a true work of art; still it is of simple construction. *Ernest Maltravers* and *What will he do with it?* are far more complex narratives, and in structure not less complete and harmonious. In truthfulness, in wisdom, in humour, in good taste, in all that marks higher poetic power, and in some respects a higher nature, Fielding stands immeasurably above Bulwer; but in skill of construction, in command of intricate combinations of facts, Bulwer may certainly claim to rival, if not to excel, him who is justly esteemed to stand first in the ranks of

the writers of prose fiction. There is something marvellous in the grasp he has of his whole design, and the skill and ease with which he evolves all intricacies of plot,—with which, without straining his characters or his incidents, he marshals all his materials and concentrates his varied forces on one result. Perhaps his only defect as a narrator is, that he sometimes indulges in a sort of new spring at the end of his story, and just when the whole should draw to its sudden solution, creates a new difficulty, which unduly protracts the finale: such is Sophy's refusal to accept Lionel, Maltravers' last contest with Alice, and perhaps,—though there, indeed, it is more of the substance of the whole story,—Philip's attachment to Caroline, in *Night and Morning*.

Joined with his constructive and narrative power, Bulwer has a great faculty for description, and a quick eye for the external life of the world. He has lived among men and seen society; he has great familiarity with the demeanour of his fellow-creatures. There are certain more obvious aspects of character with which he every where deals, and he depicts them very vividly; he can represent forcibly men as they appear in action; he can paint with vigour the working of the passions.

A certain masculine energy prevails through all his works, and is one of their best features. He may have no sympathy with the higher motives of the will, but he cannot bear to see its powers frittered away. The ambition he loves to paint may not be the loftiest, but at least it demands self-control and energy. He has represented men engaged in the real interests of life, not confining himself to catching them in their hours of sentiment and recreation, but conveying, perhaps with more success than any other novelist, the impressions of persons really busied in the affairs of the world; in all he writes there is a full mental wakefulness; nothing sleeps, nothing dawdles. Intellectual activity is one of the prominent characteristics of the author's nature, and leaves its stamp

not only on all his books, but on all the personages of his creation. His artistic and intellectual faculties give the key to all his main characteristics as a writer. He might be described as an author with a strong passion to create, and dependent on intellectual resources. Hence his fertility, and the constant occupation of new fields of activity: hence his confusion of thought, for his intellect is constantly grasping at questions in which his moral insight is insufficient to give him the necessary support and assistance; he apprehends intellectually the subjects of other men's feelings, and is for ever giving you a sort of mental substitute for realities.

From the poverty of his moral and poetic nature comes the want of inner connectedness in all his various productions; they have a common intellectual likeness, but in other respects they suit themselves to the demands of his subject or the tastes of the day: the undisguised licentiousness and freedom of *Pelham*; the effrontery of *Devereux*; the softened and anxiously explained fall of *Ernest Maltravers*, and its French taste, and sometimes (as in the account of *Alice and the Banker*) approach to French indecencies; the domestic sentimentalities of the *Caxtons*; and the electro-plate imitation of the highest tone in his last two novels,—these things could not come out of the inner nature of the same man; they are the assumptions of his art. His moral truths are got up for the particular occasion, and serve only to carry him through a single work: often they are only made up to emboss a page, or give point to a paragraph; wrapt up in affected language, they decorate the chapter, and fill up the insterstices of the narrative. The discontinuity of his moral reflections does not arise from his genius being dramatic,—it is the reverse of dramatic; it is not that the moral character of his personages varies, but the moral temper of the different works; and all the characters, however various, are steeped in the particular atmosphere which for the time prevails.

His intellectual conclusions have, as we should expect, somewhat more continuity. He has some wrong dogmas of art in which he may almost be said to believe; but his ideas, with the exception of those which bear on an ambition to win success in the world and fame after death, are not such as concern the realities of life, and the mass of his thoughts have no fixed root of inner conviction from which they spring. It would be absurd to assert that with a man of Sir Bulwer Lytton's intellectual range and large mental energy there should not be much that is true and forcibly put among his multitudinous assertions; but when he touches on any deeper theme, it is rarely indeed that his words speak with any force to us, rarely that we can escape the sense of their being artificial and hollow; and the reason of this is, that without specially analysing his feelings, every reader gathers more or less the knowledge that it is love of display, not love of truth, which dictates them,—that they serve a purpose instead of expressing a belief. From want of moral convictions, it naturally follows that he has no self-reliance; he alternately defies, and abjectly humbles himself before, the popular opinion on moral questions. 'Thus how glaringly he paints Maltravers' guilty pleasure, and how lightly he handles his sin! but of Alice, where there is no sin, he dares not say as much, but anxiously arrogates to himself the credit of her sufferings, and claims to have virtuously devised a retribution for her. Hence too, in great measure, his excessive sensitiveness to opinion and adverse criticism. A man who is sensible of having spoken the truth that is in him, or given a voice to his real inspirations, will have strength enough in himself to give its just weight to criticism, whether favourable or otherwise, and dignity to let that which is unjust pass him by. He will scarcely betake himself to protestations, and hold himself out in prose and verse as injured and unappreciated.

The way in which Bulwer gives us an intellectual

réchauffé of the original thing is most curiously illustrated in his humour and his poetry. With no inconsiderable share of wit, he has but a bare spark of humour in his composition ; yet how cleverly the imitation of it is got up in his later novels ! The “ augh baugh ” and other clumsy and laboured jocularities of the Corporal in *Eugene Aram* is exchanged for something much more like the real thing in later works. Still, every reader of common penetration sees that it does not come naturally from him ; that it is collected elsewhere, or painstakingly invented, and sewn on like gold-lace on a coat. A humorous man could not possibly have printed many of the things which Bulwer presents us with as humorous ; he would have despised himself if they had occurred to him. But they never would have occurred to him. Their very presence indicates blindness, absence of faculty. Any clever man may, with more or less success, imitate humorous sayings ; but it is a clear proof that he is thus imitating, and has no sense of the humorous in himself, when he can mistake for humour such things as are presented to the insulted reader in the headings of some of the chapters of *What will he do with it ?*

None of Bulwer's early novels deal with the affections. When he bethought himself to be humorous, and affectionately instead of passionately sentimental, he took down his Sterne. And he has availed himself well of his studies. He has not only familiarised himself with the style and manner of his master, he has been bold enough to appropriate his greatest work. And his Bowdler's edition of *Tristram Shandy* is extremely well done. Poor Uncle Toby comes off the worst ; with a tight stock round his throat and a poker down his back, he sits there in rigid strait-lacedness, doing lasting penance for the too unconstrained ease of his former demeanour ; condemned to be eternally sentimental, and to be denied the solace of laughter. A word as to the plagiarism. It was permissible to any one to take his suggestions for his leading

characters, his hints of humour and his mode of style, from a work of such recognised fame as *Tristram Shandy*; but it has always been esteemed a part of candour to recognise obligations so great, and a perfect silence in such a case contrasts ill with the somewhat officious recognition of small and unimportant ones scattered here and there through the writings of Bulwer. It does not improve the matter that *The Caxtons* is mainly adapted to be a favourite with female readers; and that with them, happily, the sources from which it was drawn would be tolerably sure to escape detection. Throughout his works Bulwer is not very strict in availing himself of foreign resources. Even his last novel bears, in the character of Mrs. Crane, and in the style of narrative, very evident traces, not so much of his having been influenced by as of his having consulted the writings of Mr. Dickens and Mr. Charles Read. He condescends even to adopt Sterne's little buffooneries in printing; and it was an unblushing thing to feed a second donkey after the model of the macaroon scene in *The Sentimental Journey*.

Nothing can more forcibly indicate Sir E. Bulwer Lytton's absolute deficiency in true poetical genius than the value he assigns to his own poetry. After ample time for reflection, he has deliberately placed it on record that his *King Arthur* is the highest effort of his powers, and the work on which he rests his claims to posthumous fame. This is to be most unjust to himself. No poet could have written *King Arthur*. But granting so difficult an hypothesis, it is impossible he could have imposed upon himself with it. No reader gifted with the humblest susceptibility to imaginative impressions can be deceived by it. He may be puzzled to explain why it is not poetry; but his native instincts infallibly consign it "to dumb forgetfulness a prey." He may not be able to say why it is unreadable, but he will not read it. The true solution is, that it is not a poem at all, but a very clever imitation of one; and poetry is a thing which does

not admit of imitations, however clever. A man with Sir Bulwer Lytton's endowments can no more sit down and say, I will write a great epic poem, than a plain woman can resolve to have a handsome face. All he can do is what is here done. He can skilfully put together the materials which poets use. No man is absolutely destitute of fancy, or even of the true imaginative faculty; but for Bulwer to attempt to vivify a poem of twelve books with the amount of bardic fire and insight which is at his disposal, is as if one should attempt to light up St. Paul's with a single composition-candle. We had proposed to make it the subject of some detailed criticisms, but our heart has failed us. The mosaic splendour of strained expression and exaggerated sentiment which, as in the case of an over-dressed gentleman, gives an air of vulgarity not always deserved to his prose works, shines out in his poems in a yet higher degree. For the rest, they serve only to illustrate, with somewhat sharper lines, the deficiencies we have noted in his prose works; they are, indeed, only novels spoiled into verse, and they have scarcely readers enough to make it desirable that they should find commentators.

With his novels it is different. They have attractions which cannot fail to secure them a wide perusal. But their claims to a more lasting reputation must depend on their real merits, not on their false pretensions, still less on the author's direct and hungry demand for applause. It is the voice of the fit audience though few, gaining fresh adherents from each new generation, which makes fame permanent. Bulwer has got a radically false notion, the presence and influence of which pervades all his works. He thinks the ideal, the poetical, is something separate from, something even in contrast with reality, and that we can in our creations transcend nature and improve upon the work of the Almighty; whereas all we can do is to give a special completeness within a certain narrow sphere, and concentrate the elements of perfection by con-

fining ourselves to a particular aspect. No poet can grasp the great whole of the universe, explore its plan, or comprehend its beauty ; he sees only patches of the world, he apprehends only fleeting glimpses of life : but the power is given him out of that which he does see to make a whole of his own ; to conceive, to create something ; petty, indeed, and limited, compared to the vast creation from which it is drawn, and within which it stands, yet which moves on its own axis and is entire within itself. But it must rest on reality ; there must be some sense in which imagination, even in its wildest flights, keeps harmony with the universe in which we live, or we recoil from its births as distorted and monstrous. Bulwer deserves sincere admiration for the zeal and perseverance with which he has devoted himself to his profession of a novel-writer ; but he is a warning that no mere mastery of the machinery of art can compensate for a severance from the truths of nature.

WOMAN.*

[October 1858.]

THE influence of women on modern European society, Mr. Buckle tells us, has, on the whole, been extremely beneficial. We presume the influence of men has also, on the whole, been extremely beneficial. Yet it would seem odd to urge this. What is the origin of this curious habit, by which we so often speak and think of women as something outside of general humanity, or at least a lesser distinguishable part, whose relation to the whole may be made the subject of estimate? Are they not in reality human society as much as men are? If one looks at the subject with a fresh sudden glance, it seems as strange to speak of women exercising a beneficial influence on society as of the branches and leaves exercising a beneficial influence on the tree. Yet a mode of speech so universal, and of antiquity so undated, must have some true basis. "Man" cannot mean both men and women for nothing; and mean it in all times and all languages. Does this expression imply that the nature of the man comprehends, includes within it, that of the woman? Not this probably; but it does imply that

* *Industrial and Social Position of Women in the Middle and Lower Ranks.* London: Chapman and Hall, 1857.

The Influence of Women on the Progress of Knowledge. By Henry Thomas Buckle. "Fraser's Magazine," April 1858. London: J. W. Parker and Son.

The Englishwoman's Journal. London, 1858.

Remarks on the Education of Girls. By Bessie Rayner Parkes. Third edition. London: John Chapman, 1856.

society ever since the world began has received its characteristic nature and distinctive impress, not from the women, but from the men who helped to compose it. It does imply, and the world's history confirms it, that the collective body of men are in their nature more strong, more vigorous, more comprehensive, more complete in themselves, than the collective body of women. It is of no use screaming about it; the irrefragable fact remains. It is idle to say, 'it is all owing to the defective education you give us.' Why not have secured a higher education? It is no answer to cry, it all depends on your advantage in mere physical strength; for to say so admits the fact, and gives an inadequate reason for it. Why tell us of Semiramis and Maria Theresa, of Vittoria Colonna and Mrs. Browning, of Mrs. Somerville and Miss Martineau, down to Brynhilda who tied up King Gunther and Captain Betsey who commands the Scotch brig Cleotus? These great names, which shoot so high, serve but to measure the average growth.

Against the great fact of subordination of place in the world's history, however, is to be placed another fact not less marked and important, that the upward progress of the race has always been accompanied by a commensurate increase in the influence of women. The fact to which Mr. Buckle calls attention, that in the palmiest days of Athens the influence of women was at a minimum, is strictly in accordance with the purely intellectual, and therefore narrow, though brilliant civilisation to which alone the Greek mind attained. It serves to show how large a part of intellectual cultivation may be independent of the woman, and how incomplete in such independence are its loftiest achievements. Mr. Buckle, with his narrow theory of civilisation, rests the matter too purely on considerations of intellectual conformation; yet it can scarcely be denied that the influence of women is less at the present day than it was before the advent of what may be called the scientific age, that our material civilisation is

the result of effort and mental activity of a more specially masculine kind. Both our forms of thought and our habits of industrial life have become too narrow and engrossing : and this defect may fairly be attributed (in some degree at least) to the fact that the quick advance and strong leaning in one direction of the men's minds has separated them by a sort of chasm from the women ; and depriving them of the softening and enlarging influence of the closer companionship of the latter, has left these too with inadequate resources for the full development of their faculties and natures.

It is the women themselves who have first become conscious of this ; who have felt their wants and their comparative isolation. They have been moved, indeed, by a practical pinch. A denser population, a keener competition for the means of livelihood, thence marriages later and proportionally fewer, the disuse, through superior manufacturing facilities, of a large mass of domestic industry,—have at once limited their home avocations and cast them more upon their own resources. They cry for larger opportunities of employment, for means of subsistence less precarious than those they now possess : but they ask also for an enlarged education, for freer scope for their powers, and for a closer interest and sympathy in the intellectual pursuits and practical concerns of men.

It has been pointed out by the author of *The Industrial Condition of Women*, that this gap prevails more in the middle, especially the manufacturing and commercial classes, than in the higher or lower ones ; and this is consistent with the hypothesis of its being connected with the rapid development of what may be called our material industry.

The defects of our present social condition with respect to the education and position of women, are real and important ; the suggestion of remedies most difficult. The question is so complex, casts its fine and inter-

tangled roots so deep into the groundwork of all our political, social, and domestic *status*; the elements it deals with are so fundamental, and the region is one in which it is so impossible to prophesy the results or limit the consequences of the changes,—that to approach it at all is disheartening to any mind capable of perceiving the mere outline of its bearings; and thoroughly to investigate it would require a comprehensiveness of grasp, a delicacy, and a patience in the intellect attempting it, which is rarely granted to the children of men. The collision of many minds, and still more the experience wrung from many misdirected efforts, will doubtless eventually educe a more or less complete and successful solution of the problem. Meanwhile it is not surprising that most minds shrink from it; and that men especially, not perceiving how deeply their own interests are engaged, and urged by no immediate practical stimulant, for the most part push the whole question impatiently aside, and, with a dim impression that their domestic comforts are endangered, hold by the old maxim, *quieta non movere*.

“For points obscure are of small use to learn,
But common quiet is mankind’s concern.”

They tremble at the bare suggestion, that the delicacy, purity, and self-forgetfulness which shine about them, and restore and console them in their coarse and sharp conflicts with the world and circumstance, are about to be lost to them. When they are told that women are like men, they know too surely that it is otherwise, and feel deeply that nothing more fatal could happen than that they should become so. The wiser women too see the extent and difficulty of the subject, and prefer to occupy themselves with practical effort directed to the outlying portions of it which lie within their reach. Thus the matter, as is usual with a new and complex subject of reform, falls into the hands of the more shallow and *doctrinaire* minds of either sex; wild projects and un-

tenable theories are vented, and met on the other side by indiscriminating sarcasm and ridicule.

It seems strange at first sight that women themselves, and their warmest advocates of modern days, should rather choose to urge the contest for extended freedom and a larger scope in the management of the world's affairs from the basis of the false idea of woman's equality with and similarity to man, instead of the inexpugnable position of her real nature, and the claims which it gives her and the duties it demands from her. The reason, however, is pretty obvious. The advance from the latter position would be too slow: progress thence must be made not by the demand of assent to sweeping assertions and all-embracing principles, but step by step, as practical wants, proved advantages, and safe means prepare and open the way. It is far more tempting to be a brilliant intellectual pioneer, levelling the hills and making straight the ways, than one of those quiet engineers of the world's progress who make roads bit by bit, as the occasion for them arrives, and never care to lay them down until there is a certainty that they will be used, and profitably used. The rights-of-woman question is in much the same position now in which the rights-of-man question stood in the days of Tom Paine. Society reconstructed on the basis of the rights of woman as urged in their full extent, would be in a yet worse position than if we framed new schemes of government on the theory of the natural equality of men.

It is a pleasant exercise of the imagination to rearrange the world on an hypothesis of what woman would be if her course of training and mode of life were entirely altered. The effect of this some bold assertors maintain would be so complete, that (except during her confinements,—if she should foolishly expose herself to such an impediment to her usefulness) she would be in every respect identical with man. Others hold that she would be distinguished from him by retaining all her

own superiority, while she absorbed all his special attributes. She would be more chaste, more refined, more virtuous, more religious ; not less bold, persevering, thoughtful, and comprehensive. These are engaging speculations, and we will not be rash enough to discuss what the future may have in store :

“Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescribed,—their present state.”

All we wish to call attention to is the fact, that the main object for our attention is women as they are, not women as they are not.

That hitherto women have ever been different from men, has not been very seriously disputed ; and the vast number of instances in which their several characters approach, intermingle, and even interchange, has not been held either by profound thinkers or agricultural labourers to efface, or even to obscure, the permanent distinctions of sex :

“If black and white blend, soften, and unite
A thousand ways, is there no black and white ?”

Probably the agricultural labourer has the best of it in the clearness of his conviction as to the reality of the distinction: the thinker, in trying to eliminate what is common, and appreciate the exact nature of the differences, gets hopelessly bewildered among the grays, and loses all clear perception of the two original colours. Meanwhile the labourer knows from daily experience that he is not the same sort of creature as his wife.

Are the minds of women, however, different from those of men? The indignation with which this is so often denied seems to indicate a deeply fixed impression that the male type of mind, or what passes for such, is the higher in order and the most to be desired. We are not quite sure that this is so ; and, on the other hand, we are pretty confident that there are real and deep-seated distinctions between the two classes of minds.

Mr. Buckle says women have more deductive intellects than men. Whether they more often reason deductively than inductively depends a good deal on the vexed question whether it is by induction they get their general ideas. But few will be disposed to deny that they resort to general ideas more readily and generally than men do, and lean upon them with greater confidence.

The most obvious characteristics of the feminine intellect are delicacy of perceptive power and rapidity of movement. A woman sees a thousand things which escape a man. Physically even, she is quicker sighted. A girl is a better bird-nester than a boy: a woman marks a thing which passes over a man's eye too rapidly for him to perceive it. Mentally she takes in many more impressions in the same time than a man does. A woman will have mastered the minutest details in another woman's dress, and noted all the evidences of character in her face, before a man who has been equally occupied in examining her knows the details of her features. And the "fine and nimble minds," as Mr. Buckle eloquently calls them, of the other sex, not only note rapidly, but with not less swiftness of movement they work out results. Mr. Buckle is no doubt right in the kind of influence he ascribes to the intellect of women, and has done them no more than justice in the wide scope he has given to its range, and the high place he has assigned to its importance. It may be questioned, however, whether he is very correct in saying that the value of the female intellect to the advancement of knowledge springs from its deductive character. It is not as deductive reasoners that women have advanced the conquests of thought. They have never signalled themselves by a methodic and skilfully executed inroad on the surrounding realms of ignorance such as those of Newton or Liebig. Of the three constituent processes which Mr. Mill describes as making up the deductive method, it is in its contributions to the first (if that be a process) that the female mind is best

calculated to be of service. It is valuable not so much in conducting deductive operations as in furnishing and suggesting the materials for deductive thought. It is an inexhaustible fountain of those general ideas (whether derived from induction or not) on which deductive reasoning is based; but it rarely employs itself in an exhaustive inquiry as to the operation or consequences of that general idea. Its habit is to use it for the elucidation of some particular simple case within it, and then to cast it aside. A woman's mind is probably not less occupied in induction than in deduction. It is constantly ascending with rapidity from few facts to a general idea, and coming down on a particular. A man's mind ascends slowly through many particulars; but having gained the broader platform, he endeavours to master all that can be seen from it. The question of the extent of women's inductive exercise of mind depends upon the vexed question how far the ideas they strike out with so much fecundity are the result of unconscious induction or simple insight: but either they have a marvellous lightning-like faculty of induction, or a perhaps still more inexplicable one of direct mental insight. Whatever range, however, we may ascribe to this latter faculty, it still remains certain that women are incessant and rapid generalisers, and also often hasty and rash ones. The nature of their imagination tends in the same direction. It is not perhaps so comprehensive as that of man; it has not the same power of at once presenting a subject vividly, and holding it steadily and continuously before the mind; it is not perhaps so searching: but it is much quicker in its movements, and in much more constant operation; it is far more of an every-day working faculty, and far more universally used by women than by men as a ministrant in the operation of thought. Hitherto, however, the former have rarely, if ever, struck out by its aid any of those brilliant theories by which men of genius seize a truth yet hidden from and undreamt of by common minds, and

cut with one fine bold stroke many a Gordian knot of knowledge. They use it to inquire what they are to do to-day and to-morrow,—to read the hearts and to calculate the actions of those around them.

If we were called upon to indicate the most marked and deep-seated distinction between the minds of men and women, we should say that the minds of men rested in generals and were stored with particulars, and that the minds of women rested in particulars and were prolific in general ideas. Men, it is said, are occupied with facts, and so they are; but it is the characteristic of the highest and most typically masculine intellects always to be pressing through facts on to the principle which binds them together, and to base their lives and practice on the results thus attained. Women, it is said, are always rushing into general ideas; so they are; but it is as a way to particular facts, and they move from and are guided by the special relations thus educed. The women, we repeat, base themselves on the general ideas, but move from the deduced fact; the men base themselves on the facts, and move from the deduced principle.

And the mind of a woman is more fluid, as it were, than that of a man; it moves more easily, and its operations have a less cohesive and permanent character. A woman thinks transiently, and in a hand-to-mouth sort of way. She makes a new observation and a new deduction for each case, and constantly also a new general idea. A man, less quick and less fertile, accumulates facts, collects them in classes, and combines them by principles; a woman's mind is a running stream, ever emptying itself and ever freshly supplied. She takes a bucketful when she wants it. A man's mind is a reservoir arranged to work a water-wheel. Women are scarcely less steady and persevering than men in the pursuit of practical ends: they are more full of resources and expedients; they have a greater appreciation of, and a far greater power of wielding, small and indirect influences—they

have tact; but they do not discuss practical matters efficiently when met together; they become discursive,—set larks and run hares; each is occupied with her own idea, and several speak together. They do the work excellently: they do not shine in the committee-room.

Connected with these distinctions is the fact that the knowledge of women is for the most part direct, unreferred, and unclassified; they differ from men in having far more varied, subtle, and numerous inlets to knowledge; and they rely upon these, and do not care to remember and arrange previous experience, as a man does. A lady will look a servant who comes to be hired in the face, and say he is not honest. She cannot tell you why she thinks so. She says she does not like his expression, she *feels* he is not honest,—no consideration would induce her to take him into her service. He has the best of characters, and you engage him: he robs you,—you may be quite sure he will do that. Years after another man comes: the same lady looks him in the face, and says he too is not honest; she says so again fresh from her mere insight, but you also say he is not honest. You say, I remember I had a servant with just the same look about him three years ago, and he robbed me. This is one great distinction of the female intellect; it walks directly and unconsciously, by more delicate insight and a more refined and more trusted intuition, to an end to which men's minds grope carefully and ploddingly along. Women have exercised a most beneficial influence in softening the hard and untruthful outline which knowledge is apt to assume in the hands of direct scientific observers and experimenters: they have prevented the casting aside of a mass of most valuable truth, which is too fine to be caught in the material sieve, and eludes the closest questioning of the microscope and the test-glass; which is allied with our passions, our feelings, and especially holds the fine boundary-line where mind and matter, sense and spirit, wave their floating and in-

distinguishable boundaries, and exercise their complex action and reaction. Women, acting faithfully on their intuitions in such things, and justified by the event, teach men also to rely upon them in their lives, to give them place in their philosophy; and incalculably widening, ennobling, and refining is the influence they have thus had upon what the world calls its knowledge. But their influence, like their knowledge, has been direct, immediate, applied to particular cases; and it has never, therefore, been very generally recognised, or moved in us the gratitude that is due from us.

The characteristics of the moral and spiritual nature of women are closely allied with those of their intellect. Their superiority in all that depends on intuition; their higher apprehension of and fuller life in personal relations, as distinguished both from material things and abstract ideas; their deeper power of influencing and greater dependence on individuals, as contrasted with a wider power exercised over numbers,—are too obvious not to have been often made the subject of remark.

It is an idle question which is the higher in creation when each is in an equal degree supplemental to the other; but if the point must be mooted, perhaps the following consideration may indicate the true solution.

If we glance through the various divisions of the animal kingdom, we shall find that the most perfect forms of each division are not those through which it passes into the class next above it. It is not the horse or the foxhound which treads on the heels of man, but the baboon; it is not the rose or the oak which stands on the verge of vegetable and animal life, but the fern or the sea-weed. Something is lost of the typical completeness of each class as it approaches the verge of that above it. The same is true of man; it is not necessarily the most healthy and highly-developed specimen which is nearest a higher order of beings; and in the distinction of sexes, if man be the more perfect creature, woman is nearer to

the angels. Woman is higher than man in her nature; she is less noble in the degree of self-control and independent responsibility imposed upon her. To man, with instincts less pure, intuitions less deep, sensibilities less fine, and a heart less faithful and unselfish, has been given a weightier charge—to be more entirely under his own control, to be more completely master of himself. Often has human existence been compared to the wide ocean, over which each winged ship of individual life struggles forward through storm and sunshine. Man sets the sail and leans over the wheel, bends his eye on the compass and the chart, questions the heavens of his place, and considers with anxious revolving mind what port it were best to seek and what course to make; asks even whether there be an ultimate haven and a pathway across the deep; and, bent on knowing rather than trusting, questions the silent unresponsive stars, and casts his lead in the fathomless ocean. But woman bears a loadstone in her breast, and, standing on the prow, gazes forward over the waves, and is drawn heavenward by some strong attraction. Devious gusts of passion blow her astray; and losing once her track, sudden and utter shipwreck on sunken rocks or sand too often awaits her; but originally she has but to be true to her highest instincts, and needs not nor cares to distract her mind with questionings of the event. Her nature is higher than man's; but man is set higher above his nature. To speak thus is of course to express, in unmodified language, the extreme tendencies of either sex. We do not mean that men have no instincts, or women no consciences, only that each is stronger and fuller in one direction than the other.

And the differences between male and female consciences illustrate the same thing. The sense of duty, the instinct of right, has in itself no discriminating power; it simply asserts in its very action, whenever called into exercise, a higher claim to the obedience of

the will than any other of our moving impulses. But it does not itself decide on a course of action, any more than hunger tells us what to eat. Conscience is the reason brought to bear on the sense of duty, rather say it is the verdict of the reason (using the word in its large sense) enforced by the sense of duty. In men destitute of judgment and force of character we sometimes see strange vagaries of the instinct of duty; and in women, in whom the reason is less comprehensive and less distinctly supreme over the impulses, the conscience is not less binding, but it is certainly less consistent than in men. It yields to personal considerations, it falls under the sway of the affections. You may see one woman morbidly conscientious in the discharge of some remote duty; and not only neglecting, as a man often does, others more near and more important, but incapable of being convinced that they are duties. You may see another in her ordinary intercourse with those around her utterly disregard all the claims of sincerity; yet there shall be some one whom she loves to whom she is as clear as day, and in intercourse with whom she would not only not conceal, but think it wicked to conceal or distort the least circumstance. Where women do feel a duty, however, they are generally more exact and scrupulous in the performance of it than men. Their sins are for the most part sins against higher impulses, the simple permission of a lower impulse to outweigh a higher one where the collision is so simple that the judgment has no place. A man feels more deeply a sin against his deliberate convictions; he throws the sins of impulse aside more lightly, especially if the temptation has been strong and sudden; but they weigh heavier on a woman, and they degrade her the more because her character does depend more on the unbroken strength of her higher impulses. Again, compassion to the individual is the woman's virtue,—justice to all, the man's. But there is no need to point out the familiar operation of

the more instinctive nature of woman finding its life among personal relations. Suffice it that out of these spring her gracious prerogative and happiest attribute—the power to live in others, through the affections to enjoy self-sacrifice, and, high above these, the faculty through love to discern and rest upon a personal God. We do not say that the influence of women has kept personal religion alive in the world; yet the truth lies not far from this; and certainly there are thousands of men who owe it to her alone that they have ever soared above a cold and stoical conscientiousness. This is a higher office than preaching, or legislating, or “inculcating ideas,” or rivalling men in any of the more general but less profound influences they exercise over their fellows. In religious life, as elsewhere, the highest of all is not that which is specially masculine or feminine, but which unites the best of both, which is based on the most conscious and deliberate self-surrender of the will to the highest claims,—which vivifies conscience by love, and loves God because he is good.

There is a vast deal which women have taught men, and men have then taught the world; and which the men alone have had the credit for, because the woman's share is untraceable. But, cry some of our modern ladies, this is exactly what we wish to avoid; we can teach the world directly, and we *insist* on being allowed to do so. If our sphere has been hitherto more personal, it is because you have forced seclusion and restriction upon us. Educate us like yourselves, and we shall be competent to fill the same place as you do, and discharge the same duties. With extreme deference, we do not think this is quite so; we cannot believe, what is nowadays so broadly asserted, that the difference between the male and female intellect is due entirely to difference of education and circumstance, and that women, placed under the same conditions as men, would become men except in the bare physical distinctions of sex. If the education and lives

of women have been so utterly obliterative of such important qualities, it seems strange they should have retained what they have got. No influences have succeeded in making them stupid, in destroying the spring and vivacity of their minds, their readiness, their facility, their abundant resource. Yet their education has been little, if at all, directed to foster these qualities more than those of reflection and comprehensive thought. Reverse the question. Do not men in innumerable instances develop the characteristic masculine intellect in all its force, totally irrespective of any training whatever: and is it supposed that any care, however sedulous, would make the mass of men rivals of the mass of women in those qualities which we have indicated as specially belonging to the latter? But it is fighting with shadows to combat such an assertion. The evidence of facts against it is scattered, minute, appealing in varied form to individual minds and experiences; but it is overwhelming to all but the most prejudiced minds.

On the other hand, none will deny that much is due to education; nor can any limits be assigned *à priori* to the intellectual achievements of which a judicious training might make the female mind capable. We only say that men with equal advantages will go further in their own direction. The same pains bestowed on an average boy and girl, will not make the girl so patient and accurate an investigator as the boy; but neither will it give the boy so quick and suggestive a mind as that of the girl. There can be no doubt, however, that our modern system of female education does great injustice and injury to the subjects of it; part of education at least ought to be directed to preserving the balance of faculties. In saying this, we do not urge, as some have done, that its office is to create and maintain an equilibrium of powers, and that those which are naturally the most strong should be allowed to rest in the vain endeavour to place the weaker ones on a level with them; that because a boy has a

taste for languages you should confine him to mathematics, or because he is a soldier by nature try to make him a clergyman by profession: the true rule probably is, to give by education the strongest propulsion in the direction in which a man naturally leans, provided it be a desirable one, and at the same time sedulously to guard against absolute deficiency in any other direction; to preserve an impetus, and to guard against an over-balance. We shall make nothing of attempting to make men of women; but there remains much to be done in opposition to a system which hems them so closely within certain limits of range, and urges them so exclusively along the distinctively feminine path. All honour to those who, without losing sight of insurmountable and ineffaceable distinctions, bend their practical efforts to giving a broader and completer character to the education of girls, and insist that they shall not be debarred from studies, and, above all, from modes of study, which strengthen and invigorate the reflective powers.

Those modern Amazons who insist upon setting up their sex as a separate class of beings, naturally at enmity with man, and by him unjustly subjugated and ignorantly tyrannised over, are fond of speaking of us as if we either followed a Machiavellian policy in keeping our wives and daughters ignorant, or as if as a matter of taste we preferred to associate with ignorant females that we may rejoice in our superiority. This is a mistake. No doubt Lieutenant Smith, skilled only in horses, does dislike a young lady to mention Dante; and Jones, who has contracted all he once knew into a familiarity with the prices and quality of cotton, trembles to be asked what Kepler's laws are; but it is an error to suppose that educated men prefer the society of uninformed women. Perhaps, indeed, there is no intellectual exercise so delightful, or so highly appreciated on either side, as the interchange of ideas between cultivated minds of the different sexes. From a female mind on a level with his own a man gathers much

more that is new and interesting to him than from conversation with a fellow-man ; he sees a new side of old ideas, and is presented with a thousand delicate suggestions beyond the reach of his own faculties ; nay, often when his mind is saturated with knowledge which yet forms a turbid incoherent mass, the touch of a woman's mind, some hint—vague perhaps, but far-reaching—will make it shoot into sudden crystalline harmony. It is idle to say that men, whenever they are worthy of it, do not appreciate this sort of intercourse, that they do not consider it one of the highest pleasures of their lives. But they hate, and most justly hate, women who parade their knowledge and their cleverness for the gratification of their own vanity, who are so narrow-minded that they can talk nothing but information, and so indifferent to the sufferings of others as to obtrude it on them without regard to the occasion. Bores are selfish, callous, pachydermatous animals ; and these qualities are peculiarly disagreeable in women. This is a class all agree to avoid ; but that intellectual culture of the very highest order to which they can attain is not as good and as desirable for women as it is for men, none but those who are either narrow-minded, or themselves ignorant, will care to deny. Of course the pursuit of intellectual excellence must not in women interfere with higher and nearer duties ; but neither must it do so in men ; and the only real difference which exists is, that the natural pursuits of men make a severe training of the intellect and a complete stocking of the mind more universally and necessarily a duty with them than with women. Do any women complain of this ? Much more justly might men regret that the arrangements of society and the necessities of life leave them so much less opportunity than women for the cultivation of the heart.

The greatest deficiency in female education is, and ever has been, the absence of means for forming trained habits of thought ; and it is impossible to say how much

of the rash and desultory reasoning of women, and their want of amenableness to logical proof, is the result of their defective education. An opinion of female tact, insight into character, and instincts of management formed in the harems of the East, would not differ widely from one formed in the drawing-rooms of London ; but the estimates of intellectual capacity made in the two places would vary as if made of two different kinds of creatures. The highest development of the human mind lies on the verge between the sexes ; and though the main distinctions are permanent, it can scarcely be doubted that in the progress of civilisation they will be ever growing less marked and prominent : only we are apt to make the great mistake that all the improvement is to be in one direction, that the minds of women are always to be elevated and strengthened by making them more like those of men ; whereas the fact is, that a great deal remains to be done for the intellects of men by making them more like those of women.

What is most needed in female education is not so much a change in the subjects towards which it is directed, at least in its better forms, as a change in its whole method. Men are taught books too much, and things too little ; but women infinitely more so. The notion is still common that the most important part of knowledge consists in knowing what other men have said about things ; to be familiar not with what is, but with what is printed. But girls are never taken past this step. The idea is never suggested to them that there are subjects of inquiry in the world, things about which the truth is to be found out, actual existences of which correct ideas are to be formed by the imagination and memory and reasoning powers. They are encouraged in the idea that history is what Mr. Hume has said, instead of being led to look back into the actual past, and to gather from every possible source an insight into its forms and conditions : they think geography lies in

Butler's Atlas, and consists in being able to name rivers, or put your finger on a town in the map, instead of scanning the real physical contour and character of a country: they are left unacquainted with the most attractive aspects of science, or taught only a few particulars by rote; they can name the parts of a flower, and talk of calyx and corolla; but are they taught to study botany in their gardens, and to examine for themselves how plants live and grow? In astronomy a few perhaps can tell you the distance of the sun, or explain how the moon is eclipsed; but where will you find one, without some special advantages, who has looked on the heavens themselves, is familiar with the apparent motions of the sun and stars, and has some idea of the sort of reasoning by which the mighty results of the science have been obtained? If women (and men too) were taught to look straight at the subjects of inquiry, and not exclusively at their reflections in books,—if they studied less, and inquired more,—their minds would be in a very different state from what they are, their attention would be far more deeply engaged, the interest aroused would be much more profound and lively, and we should have fewer complaints of vacuous hours and destitution of mental occupation.

It is much to be regretted that, for the most part, the education of girls ceases just at the time when the intellect is most alive and impressions the most deep and lasting; when the whole mind, first conscious of its real powers, is eager to test them, and presses with freshness and vigour into the realms of thought. Then we say, you have learned music and French; it is now time you should practise dancing and dinner-parties. Most of them cheerfully acquiesce in this new course of instruction, others of a higher bent grasp at some degree of wider cultivation. The aids for attaining it are certainly greater than they were, but they are still defective and very limited in their operation: it is only extraordinary minds which,

when thrown on their own resources, have the perseverance and energy necessary for self-education, and it is next to impossible that any should perceive the necessity for, and observe the conditions of, strict intellectual training. Something has been done to remedy this defect by the higher ladies' colleges, which, if they be worked with a patience and wisdom worthy of the idea in which they originated, will prove the most remarkable and valuable educational feature of these times, and the highest possible boon to the women of the middle classes.

Another advantage of studying realities, and emancipating ourselves in some degree from the enervating prostration before print now so universal, would be, that individual minds having something of their own, there would be something to impart and gain in the intercourse between mind and mind. Conversation still exists, but only among those who have experience or ideas of their own. What is the use of hearing a person's disconnected and confused recollections of what you can buy all clear for a shilling? We think it easier to get information from a book than from a neighbour; but if the neighbour has information of his own it is different. Common subjects of intellectual interest make far better subject-matter for conversation and mental intercourse than reading a book together. The "art of conversation," we all know, has perished,—that is an old story; but all oral interchange of idea seems likely to go after it. We amuse ourselves with the pains taken to converse well by our forefathers, and think we have improved on all that; but the fact is, we have improved it away altogether; and after asking where you drove to-day, and what that fellow got for poaching, we "join the ladies." If we say any thing there, we ask them if they have seen A. lately, or if they know B. But we need not say any thing. We knew a gentleman in past days who, when the company were gone, would draw his chair to the fire, and say, "Now let's be jolly, and not talk." Nowadays he might

have been jolly all the evening. If a man will ask for our ideas on a subject, we put him off as briefly as possible : we have them, but we cannot be bored to explain them ; it is a process we are not accustomed to. Even the young ladies are becoming brusque and monosyllabic. They say "ha, ha !" like the horse in the book of Job, and go on dancing. More is lost in this way—in readiness, accuracy, and what we may call general handiness of mind—than we think for.

We have many more avenues to knowledge open to us than our fathers had ; but the floating mass of thought and general activity of mind in modern society is certainly less in proportion to the ground which our research has covered than it was in the reign of George III. Both men and women of that day obtained much more intellectual exercise out of far more limited materials than we now possess. The ladies of that day had narrower educations, and were more engrossed in household details, than those of our own ; but they had more activity of mind in proportion to their acquirements, and freer intellectual intercourse with men. We dare say nothing of our wives ; but we cannot help thinking our mothers were more agreeable, more social, and enjoyed a more lively and genuine interchange of thought with the young fellows of their day, than our daughters do. Charming clever women still exist ; but there was something very delightful about our grandmothers. One thing we may notice ; there seems to have been a better balance than we now see between the mind and the feelings. Women indulge their feelings too much. They always were in danger of that ; but now they ponder upon them. In the absence of external subjects of real interest, they employ their thoughts on their feelings, which are of real interest. They turn their nice observation and their imagination to the contemplation of the features and working of character viewed almost exclusively in this aspect.

The justly-celebrated efforts of modern female novelists strikingly illustrate this excessive over-balance of modern feminine character in the direction of emotion. This class of works must inevitably, before long, lead to insurrection even among novel-readers. The reign of what may be called the brown passionate school cannot possibly be much longer protracted. The set of women therein glorified have, both in books and out of books, for some time ridden on the necks of humanity more unsparingly than ever did Sindbad's old man of the sea; under them we have dropped with *ennui*, and they have cruelly spurred us up again and again to new efforts of staggering attention. They are dark-complexioned women, superior to their sex: they are plain; and they either glory in it or bear it with humble resignation, and have never wished to be otherwise. They all take it out, however, as far as possible, in fine hair, a broad brow, and especially in eyes. They are mostly small in stature. They are reticent,—dumb almost, but mankind in intellect. They have tremendous feelings, very deep down indeed, and threatening explosion, which a preternatural self-control prevents. But they prefer being blown up to easing the pressure, and pass life like the captain of an American steamboat, seated on the safety-valve, and write books to inform a confidential world what hard and sad and dangerous work it is, and how noble it is to smile over it. They bring up brothers and sisters who ill reward their self-renunciation. George becomes a gambler; the light-haired, silky-tressed, bending, sylph-like, and dreadfully worked-out Agnes, in the utter unconsciousness of childlike innocence, wins the heart of the large-hearted, middle-aged man of intellect, who seemed to have been made for the brown young woman, and to whom she had yielded up that soul of hers which is such an inexpressibly big one. What she goes through on such an occasion she tells us; we shudder to think how often, and with what dexterous variety

in little compass, we have been made the confidants of her passion, her concealed agony, her patience, her fortitude, her rectitude, till time salves the wound, and she glorifies the mission of an old maid. We will not be cowed any longer into saying this school of writing is fine. We revolt: we say it is exaggerated, swollen matter at the best; and worse, that it is worn out. We have lost all fellow-feeling for these females, who go into covert frenzies, and put on moral strait-waistcoats to tell us all about it. We recoil from having brown womanhood incessantly thrust upon us. We revolt from the themes on which this school dilates. We kick against the stiff dresses, tight at the throat, and the white collars. We rise in insurrection against the whole school. Their virtues are the worst. We are so inexpressibly weary of exalted self-devotion; we are so jaded with all the finer feelings. We implore to be allowed to recover a little ignorance, however little, of all that a brown female artist feels and suffers. We ask a respite from calm self-renunciation and the loftiest ideas of duty. Beauty, wit, and grace in women have lost their charm for us. This is the mischievous working of these writers. They have made one thing only desirable,—the real commonplace, the genuine every-day woman. She is rapidly rising to a premium, and becoming the object of every wise man's search. Not one who makes mending stockings the screen of a fiery soul, or an apparently amiable stupidity the cover of a massive mathematical intellect,—these are the counterfeits, the base deceptions who assume the virtue they have not, and would make us think them simple, kindly, dull, whereas in fact they have no claims to be dull, but are raging volcanoes of information and feeling. Where are they gone who were once our delight,—the sprightly, educated, feeling women? They exist in the world, thank Heaven; why have these brown people been allowed to blot them out of literature? Where are those characters which Miss Austen loved to delineate, the

Elizabeth Bennetts and Anne Elliots? Spirits of peace, where are ye? have ye all gone, and left us here in misery behind ye? We fear the present exacerbation of moral sentiment will end in a return to the perusal of Dr. Franklin. If we can but once be freed from the stilts which now jerk us to and fro in mid-air, we shall be glad to stoop very close to the earth, and a new race of novels will not be content with common sense and simplicity, but will preach a decent utilitarianism, extol respectable selfishness, and write less of the feelings than of food and money.

If this disproportionate development in modern women, and the ideals they set up for themselves, is to be remedied, no doubt it must be attempted by education. But the theory of female education is perplexing enough, to say nothing of the practice. On the one hand is the idea, now somewhat worn out, that girls should be taught only what will make them useful in their homes and agreeable to their husbands. The other extreme is represented by Miss Parkes. "It appears most necessary," she says, "to open all subjects of thought to young women, and to facilitate their pursuit of all and any even to the farthest limits." There is often a confusion between learning and teaching. It is quite true that we have no right, even if we had the power, to limit by any arbitrary standard the mental activity and studious research of women; still more do we do them injustice if we attempt to cramp their stature with the idea of forming them so as to minister most perfectly to the supposed wishes and happiness of man. This is but a refined remnant of the institution of female slavery. The idea is as false as it is unjust that the best interests of the sexes are not compatible with one another, and of equal importance. The highest possible cultivation of the faculties of women ought clearly to be subjected to no artificial hindrances, either of law or conventional restraint. But education is a complex matter. We not only educe

the powers, as Miss Parkes tells us, we direct them to ends ; and, to a certain extent, we not only develope, we mould the character. If we find a little girl given to telling fibs, we do not foster that tendency ; if we find her always poring over her books, or gossiping with Anna Maria in the corner about possible lovers, we send, or ought to send, her out to play.

And if we attempt to mould character, and to educate the various powers, we must be guided by some notion of the conditions in which the former is to be placed, and the objects to which the latter are to be directed. And here arises a strong divergence of opinion. We say the sphere of woman is home, and her influence personal. Man, we say, finds his activity in the world, and moves minds in masses and from a distance. But while we acknowledge that it is good for man to cultivate the home affections, and draw closer his personal relations with others, we do not so readily acknowledge that it is well for women to have a sufficient field for their energies, and to exercise comprehensiveness of mind. This is a truth which would be more readily admitted if it were not so constantly distorted ; if the claim made were for an extension of the woman's field, rather than one to usurp the field of man. When we see women urging their right to be attorneys, legislators, and militiamen, we sometimes wonder that the other sex are so patient of their deprivations, and so slow to urge claims which are surely as much founded in justice. Why have we not "Man's Right to the Nursery," by a Lieutenant in her Majesty's Foot-guards ; or "A Claim to Lie-in," by a Templar ? An Esquimaux gentleman once suckled a baby ; it is but habit and neglected education which de-bars us all of this privilege.

The truth is obvious enough : women, as a class, can no more become men than men can become women. Doubtless there is for both sexes a common ground of thought and intellectual activity, a common ground of

moral sentiment, and a common ground of practical work. It is there that human nature assumes its most perfect aspect ; and the upward progress of mankind will probably continue to be marked, as it has hitherto been, by an increasing assimilation between the characters of the sexes and a closer approach to identity in their pursuits. But because the happiest land lies on the confines, it is the more necessary that the one should not pass over to the other. And there is no bitterer satire passed, or graver injustice done to women, than by those of their own sex who assume so passionately that every thing that is masculine must be desirable for women, and better than what they have of their own ; and who quit the pleasant glories of their own seats, to sally out and snatch the most rugged and outlying bits of the territory of their neighbour man. Women must be true to their own high qualities and important duties, if they are to draw men up to themselves in those many points in which we are inferior to them ; and men must cease egotistically to assume that they hold an incontestably higher place, and learn that it will benefit themselves in many respects to become more of women, and that the more they approach women on the higher side of their characters, the less danger there will be of their becoming effeminate, *i. e.* approaching them in their weaknesses.

“Men,” says a Westminster reviewer, “cannot retain manliness unless women acquire it.” It is true, feeble women make feeble men, and *vice versâ* ; but it is not true that the reverse of a feeble woman is a manly woman. A manly woman is a very feeble man, a feeble man is a manly woman. But a strong man is a strong *man*, and a strong woman is—strange as it may sound to the reviewer—a strong *woman*, and not the less a *true* woman, and very different from what we call a strong-minded one. A great deal of the false extreme to which the claim for women of male functions is pushed arises from its having sprung from the real

wants of a certain class, and having been argued too exclusively from the position and point of view of its members. It is the common, though unexpressed, assumption of this body of female-right vindicators, that unmarried women and unprotected females constitute the sex; and that to meet their wants they have a right to demand that the arrangements of society shall be upset and remodelled. They have a right, and a very fair right, to demand that room shall be made for them in our social organisation, and may justly, to some extent, complain that, under our present arrangements, the avenues to occupation and the gaining of an independent livelihood are too much choked against them; but they have no right whatever to judge of the nature of all women, and the field of circumstance best adapted to them, according to the wants and ideas of this section of them. It should be remembered that of women these are the least truly women, and that it is most misleading to assume them as representatives of their sex.

There are two ways in which women and men approach and modify one another. The one is where they are drawn together by the affections, where mutual sympathies, moral and intellectual, are aroused: "*Les goûts se communiquent, les sentimens se repandent, les idées deviennent communes, les facultés intellectuelles se modelent mutuellement.*" Yet so far are they from being merged in one another by this union, that each sex acquires from it its most complete and characteristic development; each gains from the other, and strengthens what it has best of its own; they approach not by abnegations, but by additions, each from the other, of what is necessary to raise either man or woman to the fullness of the perfect creature. Tennyson has said it the best:

"For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse: could we make her as the man,
Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond is this,
Not like to like, but like in difference.

Yet in the long years liker must they grow ;
The man be more of woman, she of man ;
He gain in sweetness and in moral height,
Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world ;
She mental breadth, nor fail in childward care,
Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind ;
Till at the last she set herself to man,
Like perfect music unto noble words."

The other mode of approach is the reverse of this, where men brought up apart from women, and women debarred more or less from the society of men, lose not only the benefit of what each can give the other, but something of the truest characteristics of their own sex, which are not developed in their fullness and beauty except when the affections and sympathies, aroused by free intercourse, have their full play. These men and women approach on a sort of neutral ground. Such women are more of men than the others ; but it is because they are less of women : the two grow like one another by respective loss, not by respective gain. Many things which these more neutral women may dare and do without injury, are not fitted for more real women. Many circumstances which will suit the one will not suit the other. If society can be arranged,—and doubtless, as far as the defectiveness of human arrangements will allow, it both can and ought to be,—so as to give free scope to both, this is what is most of all things to be desired ; but if the two come into competition, it is clear which ought to receive the advantage. Yet almost invariably it is the position of the neutral class which is specially had in view, and to whose supposed wants changes are to be adapted. We do not say this is exclusively so, but we do say that the great mass of thought and disputation on this subject is imbued with this idea, and that many arguments professing to be adapted to the wants and position of all women are in reality only applicable to this portion of them ; and often it is plainly said, "we do not care for wives and mothers—they are well provided for, they

have husbands and children;" but husbands and fathers take an interest in this class of women, and they will naturally continue to look at the question almost too exclusively from this side.

The real difficulty is, as to the influence to be brought to bear upon young women whose destiny in life is as yet undecided, of whom none can tell whether they are to encounter the perils of matrimony, or are to enjoy what has been indulgently or ironically called the state of single blessedness. Are women to be brought up to be wives or unmarried independent women, or can an education be devised which will adapt them equally well to be either? If there can, this is the thing to be aimed at; but is this the thing which the more enlightened reprovers of what are pleasantly called female wrongs do aim at? Doubtless the education of girls has hitherto fallen short of both these aims, and confined itself in great measure to teaching them, not things most advantageous to themselves either in the married or unmarried state, but things adapted to get them married. Still the whole mass of social opinion about women, the conventional influences which surround and mould them, are mainly adapted to their position as wives and mothers. We are by no means disposed to deny that both the direct training of girls and the environment of opinion in which they live, might advantageously be in some degree altered so as to leave them with fuller resources to meet the demands and face the privations of unmarried life. But an excess in this direction is most of all things to be deprecated; and there is undoubtedly a growing body of opinion which favours this excess. It is constantly asserted, or implied, that all women ought to be educated as if they were men and were going to live as men, nay more, that the life of man is necessary to their complete education; you must, it is said, shut no avenue of knowledge to women, and debar them from no occupation through any false fear of soiling their purity or hardening

their nature. Now if the woman is to be educated to fight the battle of life in the same ranks and under the same discipline as the man, she must no doubt learn early to fit herself for the roughnesses of the campaign; but if to the normal condition of a woman's life the freshest bloom of delicacy, the grace and depth of unvulgarised emotions, and a nature unhardened by the keen pursuit of selfish interests, are not only the highest crown, but the most necessary conditions of her highest function and influence, is it wise to endanger these at the outset? Two replies are made. It is said, woman is an earthly creature, and it is idle to strive after supermundane purity. Most true, only let us have a *quid pro quo*. If women are to be exposed to a larger extent than hitherto to the ruder and coarser influences of life, let us take what care we can that they lose no more than is necessary, and nothing without an adequate countervailing benefit. Again it is said, if woman be that pure and lofty being you describe her and would fain have her remain, raised by a holier and finer nature above the man, she may be fearlessly exposed to the same influences as he is, and will pass unsullied through them. But this is by no means so certain as it is assumed to be. Doubtless the innate delicacy and modesty of women is greater than that of men,—from this axiom we all start; but experience seems to prove that their finer bloom is more easily rubbed off. The stronger nature of man is better fitted for the ruder trials it has to undergo; contamination neither stains it so deeply nor leaves so permanent a mark. He is, as we have said, less dependent in his nature than woman, and daily we see men retrieving themselves from impressions and habits which must permanently have degraded a woman. Of course the man suffers loss; he can never be what he might have been had he been true to himself and placed under happier conditions; but undoubtedly he has more power of casting his slough than the woman has; and things which

rub off his rough outside, sink into and decay the softer nature of a woman.

Let us not be misunderstood. We are not speaking of the contact of a higher nature with extraneous misery or debasement. When the divine affection of pity, or the yet higher resolve of duty, inspired by Christian charity and Christian patriotism, leads the way, Florence Nightingale and her band of nurses may walk with ministering hands through the loathsome hospitals of war, or Elizabeth Fry visit to redeem the vicious and polluted inmates of the prison; and a stain shall no more touch them than water cling to polished steel. It is of the evils of a competitive struggle we speak, with its temptations to selfishness, to dishonesty, to untruthfulness, its not easy reconciliation with modesty and self-forgetfulness; it is of the dangers which must necessarily, and undoubtedly do, hang about many of the avenues of knowledge. Ought women rashly to expose themselves to these?

And there is danger that they venture rashly, if only because extremes have a charm for them. There are signs enough of this in what advanced women write on education. They don't like the commonplace difficulties of the beginning, the patient training of intellect, which is what they most want. They prefer something easy and *outré*. "There is," says Miss Parkes, "one branch of education so important in itself, so admirable as a method of exact training, and so calculated to supply that lack of interest in large subjects for which women have been hitherto reproached, that it must receive specific mention,—it is the study of the Science of Social and Political Economy." We are desired to "take the three reasons for the pursuit of this study by women separately: Firstly, it is most important to that sex who are expected more and more to undertake the application of detailed relief for social ills. . . . Secondly, another important reason consists in its excellence as a means of training the mind to attain power as an instrument, for

which we so often hear the less daily applicable science of mathematics commended. Thirdly, this study is perhaps the most thorough help in developing the minds of young people. Once imbued with the theoretical principles of social welfare, women would soon learn to feel an active interest in the special application of those principles daily treated of in the public papers," &c. Miss Parkes, however, is not responsible at first hand for the idea of teaching social science to the young. To us it seems a caricature of beginning at the end. That science which is of all others the most complex, the most difficult, and the least ascertained, is recommended as a whetstone to the intellects of boys and girls. The real fact is, that you may get them to learn its more obvious principles by rote, but that not one in a hundred of mature minds is competent to appreciate even its difficulties and shortcomings. To recommend it as a training for young people, is as if the ascent of Mont Blanc should be recommended for teaching babies to walk. First, it is important for children who will be expected to walk up-hill; secondly, it is excellent as a means of training the legs as an instrument of progression; thirdly, it is perhaps the most thorough help in developing the bodies of little people. We are not saying that women ought not to study economical and social science, that they are incapable of comprehending it as far as it is settled, and of furnishing new ideas for its greater fixity and extension; we do not say that minds, though young, should not, if already trained to steady thought, occupy themselves with its difficult problems: we only say that it is of all things the most preposterous to attempt to use it for either sex as an instrument for early training of the intellect instead of such things as arithmetic and geometry. The preponderating place assigned to it, and the idea of its serving as a substitute for mathematics, indicate truly the feminine tendency to give the slip to those duller things in which

girls really most want training, and to substitute for them something which shall be immediately interesting and admit of endless discussion.

It is not our object here to enter upon the question of non-domestic employment for women in its economical bearings. It is enough to say in passing, that the objection based on the tendency of their interference to lower the wages of male labour is untenable. The social and educational influences of such employment have, however, received an elaborate treatment in one of the books before us ; and may properly give occasion for a few remarks in pursuance of what we have said above. The author complains, and justly, of the distinction which so early takes place between the studies of boys and girls, of social conventions which limit their free intercourse, of the ever-widening divergence of intellectual culture, especially in the middle classes, and of the too frequent perishing of all mental sympathy and intercourse of thought through pure inanition or want of common grounds of interest. But he is not less eloquent in his description of the evil than he is confident in his proposal of a remedy. The women must join the men in their work. Men and women of the higher classes, says our author, lead a life of leisure, and sympathise on the common ground of their amusements ; men and women of the lower classes meet on the ground of their common labour. The men of the middle classes stand apart from the women ; they are wrapped up in industry ; all their ideas and their whole life are bound up in it ; and before the women can enter into their feelings and share their thoughts, they too must be absorbed in industrial occupation. For this purpose it is that woman is to be educated, that she is to study science, that she is to mingle in the struggle of life ; that she may be able to talk shop to her husband ; that she may share the narrow-mindedness from which in reality it is her sphere to elevate him. His idea is that this is an industrial age, and that until

the women are industrial too they will have no sufficient common interests with the men. He thinks if women thronged the markets and the exchanges, overlooked the mills, navigated the ships, they would have something to talk about to their brothers and husbands, and that men and women would cease to occupy different corners of the room at evening parties. He thinks public spirit would increase ; and that there would be fewer bankruptcies if ladies made up their husbands' ledgers. If young people would discuss the price of stocks and the prospects of the iron trade, there would be less idle flirtation, and proposals for marriage would be based upon more solid grounds of preference than "a fascinating manner or a taking look," which he assumes to be their sole foundation as things are now arranged.

Man, we are told, comes in jaded and harassed with the cares of the day, and wearied by incessant occupation in practical affairs. What does he want ? Rest. Yes ; but rather intellectual relaxation. Strange remedy, to provide him a wife and daughters who shall be able to discuss with him the chances of Great-Westerns recovering, or calculate the price at which it is safe to invest in leasehold houses : these being ladies too who, it is to be remembered, ought to come in equally jaded with himself. Is it not rather to be wished that men should aim at a scope of thought beyond the details of their daily avocations ; that they should be familiar with higher interests, and think them worth some sacrifice of small ambitions ; and that they should seek their relaxation from the unavoidable labour of earning a livelihood, not in talking over their pursuits, or in a state of mental stupefaction like that of an overgorged boa-constrictor, but in a change of mental pursuits which may give increased width and power to the mind, and may at once refresh and animate ? If it be unwise for a lawyer to associate only with lawyers, priests with priests, and women with women,—if college dons grow dull and narrow, and

tradesmen ineffectually muddle their brains in their clubs,—then it surely must be unwise to carry into our homes the atmosphere of our shops.

Then the old idea is still true, that it is just in her position, aloof in some degree from the sweat and turmoil of life, from the harassing and exhausting struggles of daily bread-winning, that the woman finds her truest sphere. The deeper the man is drawn into the strife, the more important it is that the woman should stand outside it : then, when the day's work is over, she helps him to rise into a higher atmosphere ; then it should be his endeavour to draw near to her. But to profit fully by the opportunities which intercourse with women affords for clearing our mental weather and elevating and refining our tone of thought, we must strive on our side to approach them, to gain something of their facility of apprehension, their power of holding the thought lightly in hand, of using the intellect readily and gracefully, and on subjects close at hand and not necessarily either immediately useful or immensely important ; we must get rid of the notion that they are always wrong when they move too fast for us, and that they were created to be defeated in argument and to be reproached for not seeing that they are defeated. We must cease to claim a superiority for having once known and since forgotten Greek and Latin, and learn how much food for discussion and intellectual intercourse is to be found in the literature of modern Europe. Women perhaps study accomplishments too much ; men — Englishmen at least — certainly study them too little. It is all very well for Thompson to think he is solid, and above that sort of thing ; the wife of his bosom knows and assiduously conceals the real fact that he is stupid and unequal to it. Brown is a reserved Briton ; that is, he is totally incapable of conversation. Most Englishmen are disgracefully ignorant of music. It is not because they have no time that married women give up “ playing ; ” it is because

their husbands are quite unable to appreciate it, and take no real pleasure in it. The fact is, that in the industrial classes of the middle rank education is quite as defective among the men as among the women ; and it is the want of cultivation and width of mind on both sides which narrows their intercourse. The men ought to possess and tenaciously to keep their hold upon intellectual resources and interests apart from the groove of their daily occupations, and perhaps as widely as possible contrasted with these ; and it is in the society of women (not necessarily, as it is too apt to be presumed, those of their own family) that they will most naturally seek and most effectually find support and assistance.

Nor is it necessary even for the discussion of business itself, when occasion calls for it, that a sensible woman should ever have been familiar with its details ; still less is this necessary to the exchange of thought on questions of social economy or politics, in which, though women will rarely broach wide views of their own, they will often suggest considerations which will very much widen the views of men. It is said that the habitual intervention of women in business would soften its asperities and raise its morality. We don't the least believe this. *A priori*, we should say that the disposition of women to give too high a place to the personal interests with which matters are interwoven, and to attach an exaggerated importance to the aspects of things immediately before them, would make them less scrupulous in pushing advantages, and less constantly open to the claims of justice and the interests of long-sighted prudence. And does not experience prove the same thing ? Do not business-women as a rule exaggerate the defects of business-men ? Are not fishwomen worse than fishmen,—female lodging-house keepers worse than male ones ? Widows are bad ; but if you would not be stripped alive, avoid a female orphan. Is not what is called a clever woman of business usually the most difficult and most disagreeable person to deal

with in the whole world? Is not the whole position of antagonistic relations and contest for advantage with the other sex the most perilous to delicacy and simple-mindedness into which a woman can enter? The scolding of the house is bad, but that of the market is worse; the coquetry of the ballroom is more fashionable than desirable, but what shall we say of the coquetry of a bargain and sale?—Fanny using her fine eyes to sell sea-island cotton to advantage, or Georgy offering you a very white hand to seal terms which, but for the sake of pressing it, you would never dream of accepting! A well-principled upholder of the rights of woman says of course, fie! such things are impossible. We grieve to say they are not; and what is proposed is not only that elderly ladies should join in the struggle, but that the world of industry should be equally open to, and frequented by, all women as it is by all men, with one single exception, made by the less thorough-going advocates of the change,—the case of mothers with large families of small children and no nursemaids.

We are strongly of opinion, then, that there are many phases of the life of industry totally unfitted for woman to enter on; and that, so far from its being to be desired that she should mingle in and understand by experience the difficulties with which many men have to contend, it is to be wished that her atmosphere should be as serene and her growth as unwarped as the conditions of humanity will allow. On the other hand, we yet more strongly deprecate any thing in the nature of a cloistral seclusion or an enforced idleness. We believe practical life, employment in affairs of some kind or other, to be essential to the healthy condition and just development of every individual, male or female; and we do believe that the number of unmarried women in modern society requires a wider field of industry than the middle classes at least have hitherto had opened to them. To discuss what this field is to be, would be a long and not very

profitable task. It is a question which will decide itself. The advantages seem to point in the direction of some of the many branches of manufacturing occupation, especially those which can be carried on at home, and with the least exposure and publicity. For we do assert, and most strongly, that there are a multitude of avocations which, in the present condition of the world, are totally unfitted for woman; and that it will require a nice discrimination and cautious judgment to select those in which she is most competent to succeed, and which are most in consonance with her nature as it is, not as it is presumed it may become, and with what, notwithstanding Amazonian sneers, we still with Mr. Tennyson believe to subsist,—her “distinctive womanhood.”

They are happiest, and will ever remain so, who can find a place for their activity in administering, or helping to administer, a household; and we do not hesitate to say, in spite of the most enlightened remonstrance, not only that this occupation is more healthy and natural to a woman, but that it is in reality a broader field, calls forth more faculties, and exercises and disciplines them more perfectly, than ninety-nine out of a hundred of the industrial avocations out of doors. It is only in the higher branches of superintendence and conduct of business that any thing like it can be obtained. Women are in a position to suffer much less than men by the excessive division of labour and the narrowing influence it tends to exert. The greater part of them have a sphere in their own homes which calls for more varied faculties and higher powers than the unvaried task of the factory or the workshop. Every woman must govern more or less in her own house, or ought to do so; and to govern is not an easy thing, nor are servants and children the easiest things to govern. But the nature of women specially adapts them to govern; not, indeed, by a wise and far-sighted application of general ideas, but by choice of able ministers or immediate contact with the persons

governed. Many women, even those whose minds are entirely uncultivated, show a power and a breadth of capacity in administering their households, and controlling into harmony difficult tempers and unruly wills, which few men could rival.

Something we had proposed to have said on the "political rights of women;" but have left ourselves too little either of time or space. Yet we will not conceal our conviction, that if there be two functions for which women are less specially fitted than any others, they are those of the judge and the legislator. If women are indeed only men a little weaker in the body, then we can understand their entering into direct competition with us, and that the right to vote and legislate is one they may justly claim. If, however, they be really different, and adapted to a sphere of life and action mingling indeed with ours but essentially differing from it, then the question is a more difficult one. It depends upon whether the exercise of such functions would aid the woman's more complete development, and be consistent with the best interests of the whole society. The argument on these questions cannot be compressed into very short space. All we can say is, that women seem to us to have more to lose than to gain by entering in their own right into the political arena; and that, constituted as they now are, and before they have passed through the great transformation they promise us, a large admission of the female element into legislation would probably carry further than any society has yet experienced the special evils of democratic government,—its hasty impulsiveness, its rash action, its discords, its unscrupulousness, and its instability. And yet who shall be bold enough to say that the English constitution shall not, with its slow all-assimilating power, find some safe practical method of including by degrees a portion of direct feminine action? As far as representation goes, it is certain that women possess, from their personal relations

permeating all classes, an absolute security that their ideas and wishes shall be taken into account. If in some respects they continue in a position of social disadvantage, it is because they have themselves chosen to acquiesce in it and fostered the conventional tone of thought and feeling in which it is based. The sincere desires of any large number of the real women in the country necessarily secure immediate attention, and certainly exercise at least their full share of influence over the action of the men. For women to say they are unrepresented, is as if the sugar in the tea should complain that it was not tasted.

Our observations have been directed not to any attempt to discuss the particular claims made for extension of the sphere of women's action; but to draw attention to the false ideas on which such claims are based by what may be called the more neuter members of the sex and their adherents. Two of these ideas may be selected as most commonly put forward, most evil in their results, and most intrinsically untrue. These are, the idea that women are to be considered as forming a distinct class in society, which ought to possess a distinctive class action and a peculiar class position; and the idea that if they are not men, it is only by some great injustice which demands instant remedy, and that the object of their highest ambition should be a successful rivalry in the masculine career.

GHOSTS OF THE OLD AND NEW SCHOOL.*

[July 1858.]

MRS. CROWE'S work is not new; but as the most compendious collection of ghost-stories in the language, serves better than any other as a text for what few words we have to say on the subject of the old-fashioned ghosts. The writer is a woman of genius. Her stories of *Susan Hopley* and *Lilly Dawson* are models of straightforward narration. A female De Foe could not have told them better; if, indeed, such stories can be said to be told, which seem rather like the conscientious detail of real incident. The power of producing this effect is not the result of art, any more than that undefinable tone which lies in a man's voice, when he means what he says, is the result of art. It is the untraceable transfer of something in the writer to his page. It is the influence, how exerted we cannot analyse, of a peculiar sort of mind and imagination. Such writers stamp their pages with the intensity of their own convictions. It is a characteristic of their minds that they will have reality or nothing. Most of us possess a certain nebulous district in our minds, inhabited by the things we are not sure of; we keep a suspense account of matters not yet determined, and many of which we are content enough to see no

* *The Night Side of Nature.* By Catherine Crowe. London: J. C. Newby, 1848.

Spirit Drawings: a Personal Narrative. By W. M. Wilkin-
son. London: Chapman and Hall, 1858.

An Angel's Message: being a Series of Angelic and Holy Communications, received by a Lady. London: John Wesley and Co., 1858.

present hope of determining. But the De-Foe school of mind has no such half-beliefs. Truth to them consists not so much in accumulation of evidence as in firmness of grip. When they have got fast hold of a thing, they believe it; that is, there is with them a belief of the imagination stronger than the belief of the reason. With the sort of bulldog tenacity which they possess, they fasten upon things new and old, false and true; and the difference between these things is merged in the common vividness with which they stand before the eye of the mind. These are the people to tell ghost-stories and make you believe them: they make tangible things where names are the names for nonentity. They grasp a spectre as if it were a walking-stick, and hold a disembodied spirit hard and fast by the button. The confidence which other men repose in their senses, or in their intuitions, is a *bagatelle* to the blind earnestness of conviction with which these minds hold to the phantasmata of their imaginations.

De Foe believed his own invented facts as much as if they were real external ones; and his imaginative fictions, from the strength of his own hold upon them, became lies to other people. This is not Mrs. Crowe's way. She invents no apparitions, and tells no history of a Cavalier; but she shows a common nature in the placid depth of conviction with which she handles her favourite subject-matter. You, she says to her reader, may believe in ghosts or not, as you please; I merely state these *facts*, and leave you to dispose of them as you can. For herself, she would far rather "doubt truth to be a liar." Thus she tells her stories well: she always has her eye firmly on the ghost she knows is there; and steadily pressing through to get at him, she brushes away the imperfect evidence, doubts, and hesitations, which obscure him from our more hesitating vision. The more wonderful a story is, the more ardently she welcomes it; the more incredible it is, the less is she inclined to ques-

tion the foundation on which it rests; and in her own heart she believes it impossible that it should be false, provided it be but sufficiently near being impossible. If she speaks of evidence at all, it is boldly to reverse all the usual and natural practice of the mind. She summons us, irrespectively of the testimony, to believe what is foreign to our experience unless we can disprove it. The majority of persons, she tells us, "forget that nobody has a right to call any belief superstitious until he can prove that it is unfounded."

This is an alarming assertion. Has even Mrs. Crowe herself acted on it? If so, she must have gone through a vast course of inquiry, to make her competent to disbelieve in very little. We should like to know some of the results. Is Aladdin's lamp true or disproved? What is the logical demonstration that ghouls, jinns, and afreets do not exist? Is that true about the bottle of smoke which expanded into a giant? Is it proposed to recognise or disprove the spiritual existence of the members of the Hindoo mythology, from Vishnu down to the substratum of tortoise; of "Peor and Baalim," "Isis and Orus and the dog Anubis;" of the deities of Greece and Rome; of Odin, Baldur, and the tree Ygdrasil; of the Great Spirit, the Premundane Bear and Squirrel, and all the chaos of pagan and savage superstitions? Are there just limits, and if so, what limits founded on disproof, to our belief in fates, furies, norns, nymphs, naiads, oreads, hamadryads, nereids, fairies, goblins, trolls, peris, deevs, imps, familiars, nikkers, dwarfs, mermen and maids, the Sandman, Rumpelstilzkin, Dr. Faustus, and the dog Cerberus? Hades, we know, is much in vogue just now; but is Charon the correct thing? and how about the Elysian fields? Do Antony and Cleopatra there walk "hand in hand, and with their sprightly port make the ghosts gaze"? How would this idea of Mrs. Crowe's, if widely received, affect our education, and especially our theology? Imagine "Arguments against Fetish-worship,

by the Archbishop of Canterbury;" "Wooden Idols proved not Gods, by the Dean of Carlisle;" and a "Discrediting of Diana of the Ephesians, in Seven Sermons, by Father Newman." All we can possibly say against the reappearance of the dead, continues Mrs. Crowe, is, not that it is impossible, but that we do not believe it; and if we say this, we ought at once to be subjected to the interrogation, "Have you devoted your life to sifting all the evidence that has been adduced on the other side from the earliest periods of history and tradition?" Unless we have done this, we are bound to believe; and even when we have done this, we shall be bold inquirers if we think ourselves entitled to say more than that the question is open. This is shifting the burden of proof with a vengeance. Fortunately for us, however, we all know disbelief is not the result of elaborate inquiry of this sort; but is due to the mind being occupied by certain positive convictions, which by their simple presence exclude those matters which are inconsistent with them; and that where no such inconsistent prepossession obtains, it is instinctive with us to seek some sort of evidence for that which claims our belief, rather than to believe until we can obtain satisfactory evidence of a negative. This seems elementary; and it is not doing justice even to ghosts to claim our belief in them on principles of inquiry so directly opposed to those which are true and natural.

Any value which Mrs. Crowe's book might have as an attempt at the solution of some of the most puzzling facts of our experience, is destroyed by the indiscriminating voracity with which she devours every thing that bears the semblance of the marvellous. But Mrs. Crowe begs all the facts, and only asks you to scrutinise the explanation of them. She shares largely in a not uncommon delusion, that we extend the boundaries of knowledge by inventing new theories to account for unascertained facts; and she is simply blind to the idea that any story about spirits can be false. An anecdote has only to send up its card

with "ghost" written on it, and it is at once admitted into the innermost *penetralia* of her convictions.

Ghosts are a theory. It is with reluctance we refine further upon their already shadowy existence ; yet what, after all, are they but an hypothesis to solve certain phenomena that have been presented ? Men have seen, or have thought they have seen, the persons of those dead as if they still lived. Various solutions of such experiences have been proposed : one of them is, ghosts,—that these figures are actual persons reappearing among us—*revenants*. When the phenomena shall have been sufficiently established, and ghosts shown to be the most consistent and satisfactory solution of their existence, they will be entitled to the honours of a scientific discovery. No one can say it is an impossible solution ; *à priori* we do not know why it should be considered an improbable one. Where we know so little, it is not wise to deny much ; but it is at least as hard to affirm without good grounds. And it cannot be denied, that the proving of a ghost is a matter attended with very peculiar difficulties ; and the first and most important of these are connected with the ascertainment of the facts on which we are to base our conclusion. You cannot subject a ghost to scientific scrutiny under a microscope, or otherwise ; nor can you, except rarely, and in a very slight degree, test the event of its appearance, as you do the truth of most events, by its consistency with other events which surround it. He comes when it suits his own purpose, not yours ; and has never shown any willingness to subject himself to experiment. He simply presents himself : if you believe in him, well and good ; if not, it is impossible for him to produce credentials. He is out of harmony with the world of matter in which he appears, and has nothing to fall back upon. His main stronghold lies, not in any evidence that can be adduced in his favour, but in the common prepossessions—superstitions, if you will—of our nature. We have all, if we would admit it,

a sympathy with the candid objector, who confessed that while stoutly denying the possibility of the appearance of spirits, he felt a cold stream down his back. It is the strong internal conviction which men in all ages have had of a spiritual world existing not far from their own, and of occasional trespasses across the common boundary, that makes ghost-stories possible. It is for this reason that they are the received hypothesis to explain various occurrences that puzzle us, and the popular and willingly accepted scapegoats of startling events. When strange noises are heard in a house, we rather say it is haunted than that material substances are moving about of their own accord ; we rather believe that a ghost than a man walks through a bolted door. In these and similar cases, the supposition of spiritual interference, though it clashes with our experience, is more in harmony with our nature than one which infringes the ascertained laws of material existence. Men, naturally and rightly, are more ready to refer unexplained exhibitions of force to hidden living wills than to occult properties of matter.

Hence general arguments in favour of ghosts carry us with them ; but though we listen with interest to particular recitals of their appearance, it is few who in their hearts believe them. If we are to do so without having ourselves experienced them, it must be as a pure matter of trust in those who allege they have done so. Such trust, no doubt, mingles in all our belief. The mass of knowledge in most men is supported more or less by reliance upon others ; but it is rarely mere personal trust. Many of us are very imperfectly acquainted with the chain of reasoning and calculation which convinces that an eclipse will occur at a given moment ; but we know the kind of knowledge on which it depends—we exercise ourselves, in a more or less degree, the same faculties as those by which others have attained to this result, and we know too that among all competent persons who do examine the question there is an absolute coincidence of

opinion. It is a matter which has received great corroboration ; but more than this, it is in its nature capable of unlimited corroboration, for every man may if he chooses test its truth for himself. Our confidence in such a case is not so much trust in men, as faith in the capacity for right working of the human mind. It is one thing to rely upon another person for the truth of a certain fact, it is another to be dependent upon him for its truth. We trust him just because we are not dependent on the sole evidence of his assertion, because there is other evidence if we choose to seek it. In the inverse proportion as facts are permanent or repeated under circumstances open to varied observation, and as they are capable of experimental test, does our belief in them depend on individual human trustworthiness. Though I may have never seen the sea, I believe in the ebb and flow of the tides on different grounds to those on which I believe in a remarkable meteor which my neighbour tells me he saw at ten o'clock last night. My belief in the latter depends almost entirely on my personal confidence in my neighbour ; not entirely so, because others may have seen it ; his statement is open at least to corroboration or refutation ; and I know from other sources that such things are not uncommon. When, however, he tells me he saw a ghost, that in the dead of the night his grandmother stood by his bedside in a shattered cottage-bonnet or otherwise, I am absolutely dependent on his veracity and powers of accurate observation ; and by veracity we mean to specify, not unwillingness to tell a lie, but all the moral and mental characteristics which enable a man to transmit correctly to another mind his own experience—characteristics which those who have had any experience in collecting evidence will admit to be rare.

But this position of absolute reliance on the individual who professes to have seen it, is the highest certainty we can attain to of the existence of a ghost. For ourselves, we rarely think it worth while to ask any one if

he has seen a ghost; we content ourselves with inquiring, Have you ever seen a person who has seen a ghost? It is rarely indeed that you can get one of these stories at first hand. They are almost always exposed to the chances of error which accumulate in all secondary evidence, from imperfect recital, imperfect comprehension, imperfect memory, and imperfect truthfulness; all swayed one way by love of the marvellous, and the still more deeply-rooted human passion, love of a good story. A man who has seen a ghost has good evidence to go on. A man who hears the account of a trustworthy man who says he has seen a ghost has evidence more or less reliable; but a man who reads in a book that an unknown person, X, appeared to an unknown person, Y, what evidence has he?

Take as an instance of the sort of testimony on which we are generally dependent in ghost-stories, and of the way in which they are retailed, the following brief anecdote from Mrs. Crowe's book:

"The American case—I have omitted to write down the name of the place, and forget it—was that of a mother and son. She was also a highly-respectable person, and was described to me as perfectly trustworthy by one who knew her. She was a widow, and had one son, to whom she was extremely attached. He, however, disappeared one day, and she never could learn what had become of him; she always said that if she did but know his fate she should be happier. At length, when he had been dead a considerable time, her attention was one day, whilst reading, attracted by a slight noise, which induced her to look round, and she saw her son, dripping with water, and with a sad expression of countenance. The features, however, presently relaxed, and they assumed a more pleasing aspect before he disappeared. From that time she ceased to grieve, and it was subsequently ascertained that the young man had run away to sea; but no more was known of him. Certain it was, however, that she attributed her recovered tranquillity to having seen her son as above narrated."

Now in this case we are dependent on the accuracy, 1, of the author; 2, of her informant; 3, of the respectable

widow. We have no grounds for impugning it in any of these cases ; but, on the other hand, it is practically not easy to place implicit confidence in the perfect accuracy of three unknown persons, and inaccuracy in any one of them destroys the story. If Mrs. Crowe were to tell one of us in print that a person had informed her that he, the informant, had been told by a trustworthy American widow that in a certain place was buried a crock of gold, say 10,000*l.* worth, to be had for the fetching,—would this induce a rush of readers across the Atlantic ? Would any single person be found credulous enough to set the probability of success in such an enterprise against the certainty of sea-sickness ? We apprehend not. And as a slight specimen of the inaccuracy of Mrs. Crowe's mind, we may observe that this story is cited to prove that persons reappear at periods some distance from their deaths. But if nothing was ever heard of the young man, how is it known that he died a considerable time before he appeared to his mother ?

The evidence, however, for this class of phenomena rests, as Mrs. Crowe very properly urges, not on any one story, but on the general consent of many. We may take exception to every single instance, and not find one supported by evidence sufficiently unimpugnable to entitle it to claim our positive belief ; but there remains the indisputable fact that an immense number of persons, under very various circumstances, and at very various times, have professed to see certain unusual appearances which have a great deal in common. It is difficult to say they were all either false or mistaken. That there is a certain body of phenomena which have been explained, whether rightly or wrongly, by the theory of *revenants*, or ghosts, no one can doubt. But these phenomena have not hitherto been ascertained with sufficient exactitude to give us data for the solution of the problem they involve. It is as Dr. Johnson said of the propriety of wearing nightcaps—“we do not know, and perhaps no man at any time shall

ever know," whether ghosts exist or not. Happily it is not a practical question. Mrs. Crowe, indeed, has a ghost (a German one) who drinks beer; an invisible hand raises the jug and the beer flows out, disappearing ere it reaches the floor in the region, at once diaphanous and opaque, of a ghostly stomach. *Valeat quantum*: but were such ghosts common, as by the kindly arrangement of Providence they are not, the subject would indeed be one to occupy us. As it is, we can afford to wait until it forces itself upon our notice.

Prophetic dreams and second-sight have this advantage—or disadvantage, as the case may be—over ghostly phenomena, that in those rare and exceptional cases in which they are clearly made known before the event, there is something to test them by. But the correspondence between a prophecy and its fulfilment is not in general a very trustworthy matter. To make them exactly coincide is at once the easiest and most effective way of narrating them. Who cares to remember the discrepancies, especially when they spoil every thing? We doubt whether coincidence would not bear the whole burden of prophetic dreams, if we could have them fairly before us. If we consider how many dreams each of us dreams every night, and how many millions of us there are all dreaming together in this London only, it would be strange if we never anticipated any events. The old question has been set aside by zealous believers, but remains as much in point as ever,—where are the unfulfilled prophecies, and what proportion do they bear to the fulfilled ones? Often the finest basis for a wondrous tale is spoiled by the perverseness of the sequence. We lately saw a lady in her usual health, whose landlady and her son had both dreamed the same dream, that she lay at the foot of the bed in her coffin; and in passing through one mouth only, the story assumed the dimensions of each of them having dreamed it three times the same night. Less than this would have served for a

triumphant case of prophecy. Thus in Mrs. Crowe's book a gentleman and his bailiff dream that a corner of the house was blown off (we are not told whether it was a windy night, and they had cause for anxiety about the house). However, the prophecy is fulfilled by the gentleman's death soon after;—and would have been equally well fulfilled by his marrying a Quaker.

This is but one instance of the way in which prophecies may be and are got up. People have a sort of vanity in being supposed to be more close to what is supernatural than their fellows. To have a relation a ghost, or to have dreamed an anticipatory dream, is in its way a distinction, and makes one a subject of interest. People who in the bottom of their hearts don't believe in their ghosts, are not unwilling that others should do so; and by affirming occurrences within your experience of which a ghost is the common explanation, and denying your belief in it, you are distinguished at once for your adventure and your strength of mind. Nothing makes even an unbeliever so sore as to throw doubts on his own ghost-story; the surest way to bring it out in strong relief is to suggest explanations, which are always met by appropriate facts; so that the crevices by which doubt may creep in are gradually filled up, and the narrator very soon conscientiously believes his narrative in its amended form. There are, however, stories where the minutest details have been found or made to correspond; and there are the stories of Scottish second-sight, of which Dr. Ferriar gives one or two singular instances, vouching for their accuracy without giving any explanation of them. Of his often-referred-to work it is impossible not to observe, that it contrasts strongly with its pretensions; and that the fact of spectral illusions does not meet many of the cases he himself adduces.

Doubtless there is a borderland of matter and spirit, in which lies at once the most perplexing and the most interesting field of human investigation. That the phe-

nomena are most difficult of observation, the evidence of facts extremely precarious and unreliable, and especially hard to value, are only reasons why the scrutiny should be most searching, and the inquiry conducted with the utmost deliberation and caution. In many of these subjects the temperament best fitted to judge of the phenomena is the one least fitted to experience them ; and, on the other hand, those whose nature adapts them to throw light by their own experience on the relations of body and spirit, and the more recondite and exceptional working of the human faculties, are generally very ill-suited to form correct opinions upon the phenomena they exhibit. If there was ever a man who combined the two necessary conditions, it was Swedenborg. A man of vast intellect, trained in scientific investigation, became the prophet of a special revelation. But not even he could exercise his judgment upon a side of his character so different. There are sets of facts which demand a more searching and persevering investigation than they have yet received, either that they may finally be disposed of as false, or reduced to scientific order. Such are, the appearance of ghosts, the power of second-sight, of clairvoyance, and other phenomena of magnetism and mesmerism, the nature of sleep and dreams, of spectral illusions (in themselves a decisive proof that the sense of sight may be fully experienced independently of the eye), the limits and working of mental delusions and enthusiastic excitement. But these things have little interest for the mass of scientific minds ; they are at once remote from their sympathies, and irritating from the way in which they elude the intellect that is used only to grapple with definite exactly ascertainable minutiae ; and it is probable that scornful apathy on the one side, and visible enthusiasm, delusion, and imposture on the other, will long leave these and similar questions in a state which makes a suspended judgment the wisest attitude for those who have no special call or opportunity for such

investigations, and which justifies the mass of men in coming to no conclusion whatever about them. There is such a thing as a wise, because a real, ignorance ; and it would be well if we were not always so ridiculously ready with our 'because.' Those who do take up this class of inquiries should remember Lord Bacon's warning, that "whosoever shall entertain high and vaporous imaginations, instead of a sober and laborious inquiry of truth, shall beget hopes and beliefs of strange and impossible shapes."

But neither ghosts nor dreams are the favourite supernaturalism of the day. We have advanced a step. Angels are now in vogue ; and departed spirits no longer glide about our bedrooms, but avail themselves of other and completer means of communication. Formerly they appeared and were mute, now they talk and remain behind the screen. The last development is a curious one. Table-turning is pretty well exhausted, and spirit-rapping flat. We always wondered why the departed should go such roundabout ways to work, and it is cheering to find they are becoming more practical and direct. They now draw you pictures and write you letters with your own hand, giving detailed information as to the state of things in the life after this. People of education and character, and with a sincere love of goodness, believe this ; and Mr. W. M. Wilkinson has had the courage to print his experience on the subject. In August 1856, he tells us, he lost his second son, then about eleven years old :

"Some weeks afterwards, his brother, then about twelve years old, went on a short visit to Reading, and whilst there amused himself as boys of his age are used to do. One morning he had a piece of paper before him, and a pencil in his hand, with which he was about to draw some child's picture ; when gradually he found his hand filling with some feeling before unknown to him, and then it began to move involuntarily upon the paper, and to form letters, words, and sentences. The feeling he described as of a pleasing kind,

entirely new to him, and as if some power was within him apart from his own mind, and making use of his hand. The handwriting was different to his own, and the subject-matter of the writing was unknown to him till he read it with curiosity as it was being written.

On frequent occasions whilst on this visit his hand was similarly moved in writing; and afterwards he went to stay with some other friends in Buckinghamshire, with whom he did not make a trial of this new power: but on his return home, after some weeks' absence, we for about two months watched with deep emotion the movement of his hand in writing and drawing; for sometimes, when he wished to write, his hand moved in drawing small flowers, such as exist not here; and sometimes, when he expected to draw a flower, the hand moved into writing. The movement was in general most rapid, and unlike his own mode of writing or drawing; and he had no idea of what was being produced until it was in process of being done. Often, in the middle of writing a sentence, a flower or diagram would be drawn, and then suddenly the hand would go off in writing again."

The writings were of a religious character, and purported to be chiefly communications from his dead brother, and were to the parents "the assistance not so much of faith as of the certainty of knowledge of his happiness in the great spirit-world." The mother by perseverance was subjected to the same influence:

"With fond affection my wife tried for many weeks, with pencil in hand, if any movement could be made through her in writing; but no 'imagination' nor effort of the mind produced a movement, nor made her fancy that her hand moved when it did not. For weeks it was resolutely fixed; but at last, on the 8th of January 1857, a slow and tremulous motion of the pencil commenced, and ended in the initial letters of our dear boy's name—'E. T. W.'—not in her natural handwriting, nor at all resembling it. Then some straight lines were made, and the day's work was done. The next day a somewhat similar movement of the hand was made; and on the day following a small and simple, but to us unknown, flower was drawn, instead of the writing which she expected; and the following day another flower, very small, but pleasing; then on half a sheet of letter-paper a large flower was drawn, with tendrils and other parts of it, to form which the hand extended beyond the paper on to the table, and made it ne-

cessary to paste an additional sheet of paper at the side, and afterwards two additional sheets were found necessary to allow room for the completion of the flower. This was the first flower-form which was finished. It belongs to no known order, though it is of a beautiful and complex shape, and looks as if it might well have existence in nature, and be no small addition to the floral world.

There was no 'imagination' nor fancy in the production of it; for, had there been, the original idea of the mind would have been followed by adapting the size of the paper in the first instance to the size of the flower that was to be drawn upon it. The mind was, during the whole process of drawing, in an entirely inactive state; and the only condition in which the movement would continue was by keeping the imagination, and all ideas on the subject of the picture, dormant.

The movement, particularly in drawing the first outlines both of that and subsequent pictures, was by long and rapid sweeps upon the paper to form the stems and other parts of the flowers, and these were nearly always correct in the first instance, requiring no use of the indiarubber. Decided lines, beautiful forms, and combinations never before thought of, were thus produced in rapid succession.

A large series of these drawings has been produced by devoting about an hour a day to the use and practice of this wonderful faculty. Several of these drawings are of large size—two feet by eighteen inches—but the majority about eighteen inches by twelve. It would be impossible, without seeing them, to form an idea of their nature and variety, so entirely new are they, and their newness is shown in so many striking points."

Meanwhile a power of involuntary writing had developed itself in Mr. Wilkinson's hand:

"I had for many weeks at intervals taken pencil in hand, and held it for several minutes at a time with no result, excepting the firmest conviction that it was of no use to try again, for that it was impossible for my hand to move; and my conviction was borne out by repeated failures. It never moved a jot; and though I gave not up the trial, I held the pencil without hope. At last, one evening at my house, in the presence of several gentlemen, I again held it; and after waiting less than five minutes it began to move, at first slowly, but presently with increasing speed, till in less than a

quarter of an hour it moved with such velocity as I had never seen in a hand and arm before or since. It literally *ran away* in spiral forms; and I can compare it to nothing less than the fly-wheel of an engine when it has 'run away.' This lasted until a gentleman present touched my arm; when suddenly it fell, like an infant's as it goes to sleep, and the pencil dropt out of my hand. I had, however, acquired the power, and afterwards the same evening my hand gently drew some geometrical and some flower forms. The consequences of the violent motion of the muscles of the arm were so apparent, that I could not for several days lift it without pain.

The producing of drawings soon ceased in my case; and in a day or two my hand, after going through a series of up-and-down strokes, moved into writing, and words and sentences were written which I can only say were not only entirely involuntary on my part, but I did not know, in many instances, how a word already begun would finish; and several times 'what I would, that I could not' write. No stronger proof could possibly be acquired for myself than that some intelligence other than mine, as it had ever before been exercised, was at work in producing words which passed not through the ordinary channels of the brain.

In this way, through my hand, it was told us that I should soon be able to write some explanation of the drawings of my wife, she not being able to write, but only to draw; and of many of her pictures I have thus written what are called descriptions of them; but unless the two are seen and read together, side by side, it will be impossible to convey much idea to the reader's mind of how much or how little they fit together."

Mr. Wilkinson proceeds to relieve good people with the assurance that this occult power produced nothing bad, and to give us some specimens of these supernatural communications, of which the following may suffice:

"THE FLOWER OF HUMILITY.

Why cannot I write of its beauty? Why does not its lovely form inspire my mind with ideas of its correspondences? 'Tis for want of knowledge of what it would say to me; 'tis because my state is not equal to know or to describe its meaning. Perhaps further on I may be able to say something of it—to see some part of its beauty and loving essence.

Trust in the Lord, ye men, His creatures, and the offspring of His love. It is from Him alone that all your know-

ledge flows. Did He not make all things by His one eternal law of love, and give us to know what our hearts could receive? It is one thing to create, and that is His; it is ours only to perceive with labour and imperfection the small part of His works which can be revealed to us because of our want of love.

O, may our love to Him increase! Then will our sight be opened to know Him more, and love Him in fullness and in truth.

This is not a flower of earth—it is not a flower of mortality; nor can it be understood by us while we are circled by our coil of flesh. It draws not its life from earth, nor from an earthly sphere, but from the love of our Heavenly King, who gives it to exist in highest states because it is the flower of high angelic beings. It is seen by them in ever-changing beauty, and it typifies their love to the Lord.

Each of those beautiful stamens is a prayer of inmost heart-striving to approach the Lord in praise and thanksgiving, and showing the pure emanations of a humble spirit. How happy is he who can do likewise, and, with open heart and eye suffused, can say—

‘O come, let us worship and bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker!’ ”

Others purport to come more directly from the spirit of the dead child, who signs himself “E. T. W.,” so as to remove any possible doubt as to their origin.

Mrs. Wilkinson further acquired a power of improvising music, which Mr. Wilkinson is told is good (who ever told a lady her music was bad?); and on his wife asking “if she was spiritually guided by our dear boy,” he got a piece of paper, and his hand moved in the words which follow:

“MUSIC.

‘I am giving mamma the music she is playing. It is a hymn of praise to God for His mercy and His enduring never-ceasing love and care. Joy comes from Him and from His praise, and shows itself in sweetest music.

All His works are musical in their divinest harmony, and join in the universal concert which is the condition of their creation and the expression of their love, returning in its circle from whence it came.

I love to hear this music—more grand, more sweet, and

more penetrating, as I learn more to know His works, and to see the infinite qualities they contain; but all in rhythm and divine perfection.

Why is not all musical on earth? It is that man is discord, and throws His sweetest works out of their created harmonies. Love and peace shall put them all in tune, and make Him all in all, and that is music. E. T. W.'"

Other communications are mentioned; and the boy's guardian angel being applied to by mental inquiries, just as on earth anxious parents write to a schoolmaster, he kindly furnishes satisfactory accounts of his behaviour and progress. Mr. Wilkinson concludes with an intimation that this power is not confined to his own family:

"To show that the power or faculty is not confined to a particular family, to a particular belief, or to a higher or lower state of the mind, but that, like all laws, it is general in its application, it is useful to tell that many persons we know have here developed this faculty, both of drawing and writing: their hands have been moved, generally at first in spiral forms; and of the first seventeen who sat down with a pencil, the hands of fifteen were moved in less than five minutes. These consisted of old and young and middle-aged; of male and female, married and unmarried; of physicians, barristers, students, Englishmen, and foreigners—a mixture of classes and conditions quite sufficient to give an average of those who can be so quickly acted upon. But I think it more probable that the faculty is universal.

Several have in a few minutes become able to improvise in music; others I know who write involuntarily in verse, and some who have the power of speaking by impression in the same way as others write, and with an enlightenment not less wonderful than absorbing for its beauty."

Such is the substance of Mr. Wilkinson's personal narrative. The remainder of the book is filled with theories deduced from grounds of *à-priori* reasoning and human experience, and from these experiences in particular, with discussions on their nature and influence, deprecation of doubt, and statements of their vast importance at the present time for the spiritual regeneration of man, and earnest applications to us to receive them in a spirit of childlike faith.

The other work we have cited has nothing whatever human about it except the printer and publisher. From cover to cover it is the work of "an angel of heaven," who has dictated it word for word to a lady for our benefit. "*Ce que femme veut, Dieu veut*,"—how much more, then, a solitary mankind-angel; and we cannot help feeling that the present one has deferentially permitted the lady to suggest to him what he should dictate to her. At any rate, if any one be curious to know how an angel of heaven writes, we can assure him it is exactly as an amiable and enthusiastic woman would do, who possessed warm feelings, a devotional spirit, and a somewhat limited stock of ideas. He will find the angel in question without bigotry, and willing to submit his lucubrations to the judgment of his human readers; who are permitted, and even urged, to pass by his truths if they find themselves unequal to their acceptance. He will even find in him occasional signs of diffidence as to his being an angel in heaven, or a lady in the flesh. He insists strongly on the importance of an unqualified acceptance of every word of Scripture; and tells us the outward letter has an esoteric meaning, and sometimes more than one, each deeper and more interior than the other. And while he tells us he is sent to confirm our faith in the great Book of Life, and bids us set him aside if he contradict one word of the Bible, he gives us a signal example of the precariousness of our trust in the meanings it is in our own power to extract; for one main object of his work is to contravene the saying of our Saviour, that after death we are neither married nor given in marriage, but are as the angels which are in heaven. These words are to be understood according to the spirit, not the letter; and so construed, they mean that there *are* marriages in heaven, with this distinction, that we are by them not conjugally but "conjugially" united, according to the spirit, not according to the flesh.

On this idea hinges the romance which is embodied

in the work. The angel left this world at middle age, without having contracted any matrimonial tie; the lady through whom he reveals himself had been attached to him here, without any response on his part; and it was only after his removal to the angelic sphere that he discovered that holy and spiritual links united them; and it has been his special and exceptional happiness that the two should become conscious of this, and find themselves "conjugially" one in the bonds of spiritual wedlock, although so widely separated. While dealing largely and specially with the matrimonial relation of the heavenly state, the whole work is characteristically silent on the subject of the female angels and their attachments.

It is not easy to deal with the deep-seated delusions of a pure and amiable nature. It is impossible to doubt, that to print the lover-like expressions and flattering estimate even of an angel must have cost pain to a delicate mind, and can only have been done under a strong sense of duty. The work disarms ridicule. It is humble in all but its fundamental pretensions; and it persuades only, and that not without a certain graceful and feminine eloquence, to kindness of heart, purity of life, and devotion of spirit; one thing only in its tone we quarrel with, and that is naturally incidental to an absorbing interest in what may be called the external spiritual world, viz. that prayer is apt to be considered less as the highest privilege of man than as a sort of talisman for the discernment of the rectitude of competing spiritual claimants for the attention. It is possible the book may be in its form a *jeu-d'esprit*, and the angel-dictation only feigned as a device to gain attention for the ideas of the author; but to suppose this would be to compliment her good sense at the expense of her delicacy, and would be inconsistent with the air of genuine, though here and there slightly mistrustful, conviction of the supernatural character of her experience which pervades the book. We much prefer to believe her the sincere subject of delu-

sions, which though mischievous, as all delusions must be, and not always consistent with good sense or good taste, have nothing in them repulsive or degrading.

There are, no doubt, a large number of minds to whom these angelico-feminine lucubrations and experiences, and a philosophy like that of Mr. Wilkinson, will appear too contemptible to merit a moment's consideration, and very unworthy of any serious discussion. Yet perhaps this is not so. Estimable people do seriously believe in these things; and there are others who in refusing them credence, do so rather in conformity to the atmosphere of unhesitating rejection in which they live, than from real conviction of their falsity, and are even conscious of an effort to keep down a certain uneasy misgiving lest they should, after all, be turning a deaf ear to matters in which they ought to believe.

It may therefore be not entirely supererogatory to venture a few remarks on the nature, and more particularly the value, of this the latest and most fashionable form of assumed intercourse with what is called "the great world of spirits." As to the experiences of the Wilkinson family circle, to us they seem to present no such perplexing phenomenon as their exponent supposes. He has a chapter on Doubts, in which he discusses the theories adverse to its supernatural solution, and disposes of them to his own satisfaction. He omits, however, the simple and obvious explanation that they immediately invite. He approaches it, indeed, near enough to say that they cannot be the work of the imagination; for that, he says, presupposes a conceived whole consciously worked out in its details. This is, no doubt, one way in which the imagination works; but either it or the subordinate fancy has an allied function much more unconscious in its working. "Find me a poet," says Mr. Wilkinson, "whose ordinary mode of writing his appreciations of the divine was not only not with labour and with difficulty, nor with a mind pregnant

with the images to which he was giving birth, but without even having a cognate idea in his mind of what he was writing about. . . . Where is the artist who sits down to his paper without an idea or an image of the picture he is to draw, who measures not with his mind and with his eye the combinations of his forms, and their fitness to the general design? Finally, who sits down thinking he will draw a flower, and whose hand flows off in writing?"

Perhaps it is too much to say that a poet ever writes "without a cognate idea in his mind of what he is writing about;" but neither does Mr. Wilkinson do this; his subject is always previously suggested to him, and prominent in his thoughts; he says himself he asks a mental question, and he knows really the sort of thing the hand or mind is expected to produce. On the other hand, every artist must be aware that he owes a great deal to the unconscious working of his mind or hand; hints seem to arise spontaneously, and much of his art consists in his availing himself of them, and giving them shape and consistency. A metaphor flashes across the mind, an imperceptible turn of the wrist adds an unpremeditated grace, which enchants with delightful surprise him from whose hand it flowed; and so little are we able to trace the fine clues of suggestion from which these things (often the best we are capable of) arise, that we use as a metaphor to describe their origin that which Mr. Wilkinson thinks a reality, and speak habitually of the "inspirations" of genius. No one has solved the problem of the mode in which thoughts spring up in the mind. We can direct the intellect to certain subjects, we can lead and control our thoughts; but we cannot explain their birth, nor understand the way in which they rise to the surface of the mind, like bubbles floating up in swift succession on water. They are part of the working of the mystery of life. To a certain extent we can voluntarily withdraw our control over them;

sleep in general has this effect completely, and a thousand fantastic frivolous images, mingled with others of deeper import, all destitute of any apparent chain of connection, rise and break in swift succession. Thus we have no doubt it is true of most men,—men at least who have ever touched a pen or pencil at all, so that the hand is free to move,—that if they will sit with it often enough and long enough pointed to paper, they will begin to draw figures and write words ; and that they may to a certain extent let the thoughts take their free course ; that they may in a great measure hold in abeyance the controlling power, and may easily persuade themselves, if they desire it, that they do so entirely. The large return Mr. Wilkinson makes of persons who on trying the experiment were spiritually guided, is probably due in great measure to the contagiousness of an example in so imitative a creature as man. But though some men, if uninformed of what was expected of them, might sit for ever, pen in hand, without feeling any impulse to move it, there are those who would soon begin to draw or write—some determinately and to a fixed end, others vaguely and without purpose.

It is in every idle schoolboy's experience that the sort of geometrical and flower figures Mr. Wilkinson describes, form themselves half unconsciously under his hand as he sits wondering whether he shall ever get his sum right. Our grandfathers and grandmothers had a recognised branch of painting, the technical name of which we have forgotten, but which may be found described in Gilpin. It consisted in making a blot of colour on the paper, and pushing it about arbitrarily with the pencil, and then seizing hints from the accidental forms it assumed gradually to develop a landscape out of it. Such a work requires but little effort of mind, but to draw spirit flowers requires yet less. As to their beauty, that will depend, we think, on the person who holds the pencil ; and the forms which proceed

from the not consciously controlled meanderings of the fingers of a lady of refined mind, even if uncultivated in art, will very likely possess grace and elegance. Produced under the stimulus of excitement of the religious feelings and natural affections, her efforts, both in drawing and music, may surpass all that could previously have been anticipated from her. Did the drawings improve, as Mr. Wilkinson mentions? We have no doubt they did; and, indeed, we learn that she has advanced from flowers to houses and temples, and even to colouring, in which she exhibits marvellous proficiency for a beginner. Progress, both in the delusion and in the execution, is what we should expect, as the mind became accustomed to work in this particular channel, and the hand gained facility by practice. The fancy may be fostered into very luxuriant growths. Shelley at one time in his life determined to note down his dreams; but he found that by giving attention to them they became so protracted and detailed, that the narration of them would have occupied all his time.

We give Mr. Wilkinson full credit for moral truthfulness, if not for intellectual accuracy and judgment. We think he is unnecessarily hard upon himself when he says, that not to be able to decide after forty years' experience whether he moves his own hand himself, or whether it is moved by another power, argues utter imbecility. "Not to know," he proceeds, "whether or not he was aware in his intellect or knowing power previously to his hand moving of the direction it would take, would bespeak an entire absence of reason, and of the natural senses and faculties. Yet such is the utter imbecility imputed to us by those who try to explain by imagination a fact which they cannot otherwise dispose of." When a practised rider sits his horse, and accommodates himself to every movement of the animal, does he know beforehand what direction his body or arm will take as he sways the one or moves the other? Does an absorbed man never

walk to the end of his garden-terrace, and feel surprised to find himself there? Is he conscious of how he put one foot before the other, and avoided the flower-beds? or does this procedure of his demand the theory that angelic attendants lifted his legs for him? The muscles are more under voluntary control than the thoughts; and it is unquestionable that the mind will work almost, if not quite, unconsciously, and will guide the hand, and moreover, that it will do so without trespassing over certain preconceived boundaries, and especially in directions long practised. To make oneself the subject of the *argumentum ad absurdum* is an imprudent form of argument. No doubt Mr. Wilkinson believes his mind to have been absolutely passive when his hand was writing descriptions of his wife's drawings; certainly they bear more traces of raised feelings than of active intellect. The question, however, is, as to absolute passivity of mind; and here, though unwilling to adopt his own measure of the deduction to be drawn, we cannot help thinking he deceives himself.

If, as he supposes, it is merely a spirit guiding the hand, the mind may not only be passive, but otherwise employed. Did Mr. Wilkinson ever try the experiment whether a spirit would use his arm to make connected revelations while the whole powers of his mind were otherwise occupied, say in extracting a square root by mental arithmetic? or if that be easy to him, something harder, something which should engross his whole recollection; and that incessantly, for it is easy to draw flowers in the interstices of a mental process; many persons adorn their manuscripts with such things in the margins. The less skilful draw geometrical figures and flowers and sprigs, or rather perhaps what those who do not think them of angelic origin would conceive to be patterns for work on ladies' collars; the more advanced draw heads, figures, and landscapes, or even write a verse or two: and these things are done with every shade of

volition, from conscious efforts at particular results to mere unconscious scrawling. Who has not been surprised at what he has thus made? who has not drawn faces not knowing how they would turn out, and given them their appropriate names after they were finished? Or take an analogous phenomenon of every-day occurrence: how is it that when we wish to copy a certain thing, say a mere profile, we cannot succeed, but draw something more or less different from what we intend to draw, and which yet has a definite signification of its own? So far from there being any difficulty in the unpremeditated production of forms which shall have every degree of completeness and significance, it is, on the contrary, the highest triumph of the artist to be able to subject his hand and whole delineating powers to his own absolute control, to make a perfect portrait, or exactly to reproduce in words or colours his own inward conception. Our whole life is made up of conscious and unconscious movement, the boundaries of which are often most intricately and perplexingly confused.

Is all that part of the life of mind and heart which springs from sources beyond our discernment, that which seems the spontaneous flow of thought and impulse, to be referred to the direct dictation of an intermediate class of beings superior to ourselves? Mr. Wilkinson does not hesitate to claim for them all this common origin; and maintains that

“All thoughts, all feelings, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,”

are the suggestions of spiritual beings either good or depraved. Indeed, the whole material world is, according to him, sustained and made manifest by their action. “Nothing in this world is produced or presented to view, or experienced, but by means of spiritual *agency* in the hands of the Almighty.” We ourselves are a field for the rival activity of angels and demons. It is in our

power to pass judgment on these varied inspirations, to accept them or refuse them ; and this process makes our lives. The theory is not new ; in a more specific and detailed form it was held by Origen, and is one of those purely speculative hypotheses which are scarcely amenable to the judgment. No doubt the supposition will explain the phenomena of unconscious action and untraceable suggestions. The theory of a living power, whose limits are unknown, acting in a manner which is unintelligible, will solve, as far as it solves at all, most difficulties. If I choose to assert that the reason of the sap rising in trees is that an angel visits them in spring, and draws up their juices by exhaling warm breath over their branches ; or if I agree with certain nations that in an eclipse the sun is in danger of being devoured by some fearful celestial monster,—who is to prove me wrong ? It may be shown me that other explanations are more in harmony with ascertained facts of the universe, but it is still in my power to maintain that these things are as I say, and to complain bitterly of the want of faith in my assertions. No doubt spiritual life underlies the material universe ; no doubt the universe stands and lives by the creative, and most will think by the ever freshly-flowing creative, energy of the Divine Mind ; it needs no messenger from Abraham's bosom to tell us this, nor, if we believed it not sure, could his coming assure us of it : the question is, whether, as some of our modern mystics hold, this world is a sort of dull reflex of another, the same, yet different, according to the doctrine of types ; or whether the sustainment of life and thought and material existence in this world is a work delegated to the personal efforts of a class of celestial functionaries ; and men, as it were, a set of discriminating French horns, on which any spirit may take his turn to try and play his own tune.

Of this theory it may be observed, that if such power is given to angels and demons, it is at least very strictly limited ; and that it depends in very great measure, if

not entirely, on ourselves, not only how we shall receive the suggestions of angels, but what suggestions the angels shall make to us. No one, we suppose, will deny that the mass of a man's thoughts and impulses are in harmony with his character, and that even in sleep an idle and luxurious man dreams different dreams from one active and ambitious. The winged aspirations of Milton do not visit a sordid spirit ; a man who has not studied mathematics makes not the prophetic guesses of Newton. Even the infantine Wilkinsons are so far in keeping with the rest of mankind, as to vent revelations "suited to their tender years." The more accurately we observe, the more distinctly we see that things come to men in exact proportion to their capacity to receive them ; and we may well, therefore, believe that the flow of thought and impulse is arranged in some definite connection with the ever varied and ever changing forms of character and intellectual capacity, as they vary with original organisation and subsequent training,—that they are bounded by definite laws, and not left to the direct and conscious industry of other beings of whose existence we are ignorant. Were it not so, the word 'character' would not possess a meaning.

To suppose that personal influence and effort, of all others the highest, should be employed as machinery for the production of our daily thoughts, seems to involve a waste of power very inconsistent with what else we know of the divine arrangements. By personal influence to guide man might be a task not unworthy of those far above him ; but it is not very possible to believe that to be the anonymous manufacturer of all the thoughts, fancies, and impulses which flit through his heart and brain, whether awake or asleep, could afford scope for the activity of a higher class of beings. To appreciate what it would be, we must put ourselves in a corresponding position. Animals have doubtless some degree of self-determining power. To train a dog is no bad exercise of

the faculties ; but imagine what it would be for us to find an occupation in suggesting for his consideration such hints as, "Bark ;" "Smell a rat ;" "Chase a rabbit." Would the most zealous advocate of this theory like to find his sphere of activity in dictating the dreams and waking thoughts of a growing litter of pigs ?

On the other hand, it is very possible that incidentally the lives of higher beings may influence us, just as men incidentally and unconsciously on both sides influence one another. We do not here discuss the question how far the radiating influence of the lives of higher beings than ourselves may affect us. It is possible it may do so, as here we see the consequences of one man's act flowing in ever widening circles of untraceable influence upon other men ; and none can say that there are not other beings whose actions unconsciously modify, in common with those of other men, the mental and moral atmosphere we breathe. Neither do we here discuss the theory of *occasional* direct but concealed interference by suggestion from higher beings, though little disposed to believe in it, as loth to accept the idea of anonymous personal influence. Still less do we enter upon the subject how the Holy Spirit of God visits the spirit of men, to warn, to purify, to comfort, to sustain, or to inspire. We wish only to draw attention to the fact, that these are questions entirely different from that we have been dilating on,—the hypothesis, that is, of universal spirit influence as the source of all our mental and moral activity ; and still more, from the more modern and special teaching of Mr. Wilkinson and his fellow-labourers, that a new era has arrived, in which spirits are to be self-revealed to us, and we are to receive the communications of recognised individual members of another world, and moreover, to receive from them not mere suggestions, but inspired knowledge of particular facts hitherto beyond our cognisance. Mr. Wilkinson presents himself as one who has himself experienced such

intercourse, and publishes the results for our benefit. Though such an inquiry inevitably exposes us to the stigma which in the minds of these supernaturalists always attaches to the demand of any reason for a new belief, it is impossible to help inquiring on what ground Mr. Wilkinson bases his own convictions, and demands our confidence.

When asked what induced him to give admission to the impression that the drawings and writings he describes came from his dead son, he tells us, "it was too beautiful a thought not to be a true one." "Not a few," he says elsewhere, "have said that all they saw and heard was beautiful, and they only wished they could believe it to be true ; thus not recognising the great spiritual truth that all which is really beautiful must of necessity be true." Do people really deceive themselves with such expressions ? Are beautiful fancies existing facts ? There is a sense in which the Beautiful is the True. Sir Edward Bulwer wrote them thus with capital initials, and maundered a good deal about them, some years ago ; but he used the True in contradistinction to the Real. Did the Ulysses of Homer ever live ? is the play of *Cymbeline* a proof that the things there related took place as there described ? or are all the dreams of all the poets unreal, and only the dreams of Mr. Wilkinson true ? When we ask on what grounds, however he himself may have been convinced, others are to give their assent to the reality of these things, we are desired to exercise a childlike faith. This we confess is a little irritating. Trust can only be reposed in persons. In whom is this childlike faith to be reposed ? In Mr. Wilkinson and his family. On their sound sense and discretion, the moral certainty they can give us that they are not self-deluded, rests the whole supposed revelation, if it is to be received as a matter of faith. On what grounds does this family circle arrogate so unlimited a confidence ? The ancient Roman Church, grown gray in power, and crowned with

mighty intellects, her annals starred with the names of saints and martyrs, makes the same demand, bids us trust her, and reap the fruits of faith. Do we deny her, to bend before every self-established communicant with the so-called spiritual world? Any man may be convinced that he has received a revelation; it may approve itself to him by internal evidence which it is impossible for him to resist: but he cannot convey this certainty to another mind; and the only way in which it can be accepted as a matter of faith, is by an implicit trust in the accuracy as well as the integrity of him who offers it. Such an acceptance is one independent of the judgment; we believe without inquiring. There is also an acceptance based upon the judgment. A revelation may be accompanied by external signs appreciable by others than he who is the channel of it, and which by their character indicate a supernatural origin; the matter of it may approve itself to the judgment from its accordance with existing intuitions, experience, and conviction; and furthermore, the judgment may and does pronounce also upon the character and moral and intellectual trustworthiness of the revealer. Practically, we rely in part on the judgment, in part on the moral confidence excited by the person; and in the great revelation in which we trust, this confidence was inspired by the personal presence, the life, and actions of him who promulgated it, and the Life was at least no less a revelation than the teachings. Our faith can have no place in an anonymous revelation, or, what is much the same thing, one made by a person of whom we know nothing.

The only new things in the present revelations, beyond the fundamental assumption on which they are based of direct personal communications between spirits and men, are certain special facts, as that there is marriage in heaven, that beasts exist there in a certain way, that there are houses and flowers there, that little boys are taught by guardian angels and wear purple tunics, &c.;

and there are also certain other ideas previously more or less received, which are presumed to receive the confirmation of an unquestionable authority from the same source, as that the soul does not linger in the grave, that a man will issue in the next world as he has framed himself by his life here, &c. On the probable truth of the first class of special minutiae the judgment can form no opinion. There is a certain class of great revealed facts connected with man's spiritual and moral nature, and the experience of his life and heart, on which it can do so. It can say, or if unable to decide, it can learn by trial, whether the teaching be true that self-sacrifice is greater than self-seeking, activity than sloth, forgiveness than revenge, the spirit of trust than the spirit of suspicion. But on matters of fact not thus connected with our existing knowledge or capacities, it can say nothing. There may be a thousand conflicting statements among which it can make no choice whatever. That angels are in the habit of communicating with their fellows by means of horses and other creatures with scrolls in their mouths, who rise into existence for the nonce; that a particular little boy resides in a particular little house, of which a drawing is furnished, and has his stage of spiritual advancement marked by the position of a cross on a ladder; that a man who was blind here to the attachment he has inspired may reciprocate it after he has become an angel; that there is an intermediate stage in the next world devoted to reading the Bible, under the superintendence of a tutorial angel,—on all these points it is impossible for the judgment to come to a conclusion. They may be true; trivial and impertinent as some of them seem, no man at least can prove them to be false; but if we are to believe them, it can only be by virtue of an unlimited confidence in the spirits from whom they are said to be derived, and in those who say they derive them from spirits.

It is of importance too to observe that the kind of in-

formation professed to be obtained from these sources is not of the slightest use to men. A revelation of facts descriptive of a mode of existence entirely different in kind from our own can neither exercise the intellect nor subserve the life. It cannot exercise the intellect, for no activity of mind can acquire it or test it, nor can we extend it one inch. It is a deposit of dead barren scraps of information, of which we are the passive recipients. It is a great thing for an astronomer to weigh a fixed star; but for an ignorant man to have the weights of every star in the heavens dictated to him would be of no profit to him. The divine providence has not hitherto made arrangements for gratifying the idle curiosity to which alone this kind of angelic information can minister; and there seems to be every *à-priori* reason for believing that the original plan still remains adhered to, by virtue of which man is not supplied with ready-made knowledge through a process of dictation, but only furnished with the capacity and the materials for acquiring it. That the affections would find a solace in communications with the spirits of the dead, if such a privilege were accorded, we do not deny, and most men will regard with compassion rather than rigour the weakness of a mother too prone to believe that her dead child can whisper comfort across the grave, and confide his infantine experiences of heaven as freely as he did those of earth; but it is not easy to extend the same indulgence to a man who makes his delusions the basis of a new philosophy, and the inauguration of a new religious era.

Nothing can be more ridiculous than the contrast between the importance attached by enthusiastic votaries to a belief in ghosts or spiritual communications, and the actual results attained even on their own showing. Mrs. Crowe, speaking of the reports of our future state, says, they "may perchance turn out to have a deeper interest for us than all those various questions, public and private, put together with which we are daily agitat-

ing our minds." How can this be? It is here we are living, not there; whatever may be the exact conditions of our future existence, we know what the grand ones are; we know that it is by our life here that we must be fitted to avail ourselves of the highest promises of that which is to come. And can any thing be more absurd than to say, that prying into its details a little before the time is of more importance to us than the study and practice of those things, our conduct among which will practically influence our existence in that new world, perhaps for evermore? What would Mrs. Crowe think of a farmer who should devote himself to the study of Zadkiel's Almanac for next year, and maintain that this was of far more importance than sowing his wheat now?

This lady, unwilling to treat us as absolute disbelievers, reproaches us with the lightness of our belief in ghosts. A firmer confidence in them would give, she thinks, to our ideas of immortality certainty and definiteness. Now most of us are pretty well convinced of our immortality, and those who are not will hardly yield to the witness of ghosts. He, indeed, who has seen a person returned from the grave, and convinced himself that what he saw was an existent being, and neither a delusion nor a mere floating film or mechanical reproduction of a formerly-existing form,—such a man has gained a new certainty of the life beyond the grave of a particular person; but the evidence which, at present at least, can be furnished to men in general of the nature of such appearances is certainly not calculated to supply them with any additional grounds of certainty. As to definiteness, ghosts at least have been wise enough not to attempt this. They are not communicative; and this is very much in their favour as compared with their friends the spirits and angels. They commit themselves much less. They very rarely speak at all; when they do, it is curtly, and without descending to particulars. Few, if any, have carried the matter further than the celebrated ghost of

Ficinus, who, having agreed with his friend Michael Mercato that he who died first should appear, if possible, and bear evidence to the other world, did so appear after death ; and galloping up to the door of his friend early in the morning, dressed in white, on a white horse, cried under his window, "O Michael, O Michael! those things are true;" and so rode away again at the gallop. Mercato did not profess to see more than the back of this ghost, riding fast; but the story is so picturesque that it finds universal credence, and we are gravely assured that Baronius, who tells it, was a man of great probity, and had it from Mercato's grandson. Whether the grandson was a man of great probity does not appear, nor from whom he had it.

But ghosts, though taciturn, vary in their behaviour; and if we are to become disciples of Mrs. Crowe, and believe all that is reported of them, our ideas of the world we are hereafter to inhabit might be definite, but they would certainly be confused. Some of us that died of drowning are to remain wet through; others are to sit as torchlights on our graves,—a tedious and unprofitable way of spending eternity, so it seems at least; others of us, again, can come out of our graves to enjoy the society of our lovers, and even carry back presents we receive into the sepulchre with us. We shall not rest, witnesses a German ghost (they have such odd notions, these German ghosts), unless we pay our tobacconist's bill, and return any magic-lantern slides we may have borrowed. It may make part of our amusement to throw hair-brushes at lieutenants; we may range the universe or be *glebæ adscripti*, and only have the run of an old house, or pace up and down a tombstone. Some of us are in irons, some of us are headless. We may find our punishment within us; or, again, we may be condemned to the more orthodox hell, which the young Glasgow rake visited before his time, apparently fresh from the perusal of *Vathek*, and found his dead acquaintances playing loo and exer-

cising their other favourite vices, each with a burning flame in his bosom. It is from want of consideration of this varied information, derivable from ghostly sources, Mrs. Crowe tells us, that "when we are about to die we are seldom in a situation to do more than resign ourselves to what is inevitable." Seldom indeed !

Men have ever been familiar with the idea that the spirit does not rest with the body in the grave, but passes at once into new conditions of being. The opinion has gained adherents, and disputes the ground with the more material one that it rests in sleep with the body, to await one common day of awakening and judgment ; and so confused are the ordinary impressions on the subject, that you may hear a clergyman, in a funeral-sermon, deliberately giving expression to both in one discourse, and telling you in the same breath that my lady lately deceased is a patient inhabitant of the tomb and a member of the angelic company. But the idea of uninterrupted life has so strong a hold on the affections, which cannot bear the idea of even the temporary extinction of that which they cling to, that it has the instinctive adherence of almost every one who has felt deeply and stood face to face with death. Again, that heaven and hell are states, not places ; that the mind of itself can make a hell of heaven, and heaven of hell ; and that the rebellious spirit brings "within him hell and round about him,"

"Nor from hell
One step, no more than from himself, can fly
By change of place ;"—

these are not new lights of the day. Whatever a man may choose to imagine or believe to be revealed as to future conditions of existence, yet that sin can bring its own punishment, and that the spirit can find room within itself for terrors too awful to contemplate, and joys ineffable, are truths within the actual experience of many. We can but smile, then, at the idle boast which affirms that

we owe these ideas to the reappearance of the dead and the penetration of spirit-seers. And when the advocates of these new sources of information claim such accordant testimony as they may afford on these and similar points as proof of the truth of what they tell us, is it not pretty clear that they are availing themselves—some consciously, others unconsciously—of previously existing impressions, especially as they diverge in the most wonderful way when they come to details? Whom are we to believe—St. Theresa, with her hosts of Jesuits treading the courts of heaven in white garments, with floating banners; Jacob Behmen, with his cosmical revelations, his ‘Yea and Nay,’ and his seven principles or ‘Mothers of Existence;’ Swedenborg, with his picturesque imagery and his profound thoughts shaped in delusive forms; or some one of a host of others, down to the more shallow and vulgar seers and rappers of modern America, all alike making demands upon our faith?

The ancient mystics had some claim to our admiration and respect in the merciless self-denial, the devoted self-abnegation, or the tasked thought through which they strove to penetrate to the sphere of central illumination; but the wind is tempered to the shorn capacities of the modern lamb. The royal road to supernatural knowledge is open indeed, where every one may run who can only hold a pen in his hand. The more ignorant one is of what other men know, the more important it is to be enlightened in matters of which they are ignorant. He who has every thing else to learn, is the most intent upon being well informed on disembodied spirits; another, who finds natural science hard, believes his Maker has confided to him, without any effort of his own, an instinctive shortcut to the symbolic meanings of the universe, and rushes into types and anti-types: the devil himself cannot spell well, and the angels dictate bad grammar. But this knowledge is not always to be trusted. Apart from all the chances of error among the interpreters, it seems the spi-

rits themselves are not to be implicitly confided in ; we are warned against lying spirits, and a taste for mischief is not confined to the flesh.* Some, we are gravely told, *can* only give you back your own preconceived answer to a question ; nor can we help suspecting that this reasonable limitation applies to them all. The strong sense of the danger of an opening to disorder which appears in the more candid of these writings is itself an evidence, if one were needed, of the closeness with which imposture and charlatanism tread on the heels of delusion.

If these so-called revelations are based on fact, and are not the echoes of the intelligence of the revealers, varying with themselves and the age in which they live, a curious question suggests itself as to what has become of the Devil. He was well known in the middle ages, and far more familiar with us than the angels ; was constantly seen about till quite lately, and had abundance of avowed disciples. Why do we never hear of him now ? and what has become of his well-accredited imps, his witches, and the grotesque faces he used to pull ? He can't be dead,

* We have heard a story which sets the occasional mendacity of spirits in a strong light. A lady visiting at a house where two of the children were remarkable for their command of spiritual intercourse, had in some way or other made her absence desirable to these young people. It was accordingly revealed to them that her husband was ill in London, and required her immediate presence. The lady, possibly from the very fact of her being a believer, possessed more faith in the constitution of her husband than in the competency of the seers ; she stayed quietly where she was, and listened with incredible calmness to fresh revelations of the worst aggravation of his symptoms. Soon a letter arrived to say he then was and had been perfectly well. On this news being submitted to the juvenile seers, they were not the least discomposed, but cried, " O, it's that horrid Lord Byron again ; he's always coming and telling us some flam or other." Perhaps the children were mistaken ; if not, the punishment of the author of *Don Juan* in the next world has been heavy indeed.

for practically he is as active as ever. Can any sufficient reason be given for his having retired so completely from the boards of the supernatural theatre?

As to the religious tone which prevails in the two works we have selected, we do not wish to question the sincerity and piety of the minds that have dictated these revelations to themselves, or to doubt that they are published from a conscientious sense of their importance, and the duty of making them known,—a duty which, to the authoress of the *Angel's Message*, it would be unfair to doubt was a painful and difficult one. But they do not fill up the promises with which they are preluded. There is in them nothing of that power with which a mere mortal endowed with genius lays bare the secrets of our hearts, and the true sources of our sins and our consolations, gives a new application to old principles, and a fresh hold to old truths. If these spirits and angels were to preach from our pulpits, we should listen to them with the respect and attention a sermon always commands: but we should not wish to sit under them habitually; we should shrink a little from a certain tone of sentimental familiarity. They enjoin the love of God and love of man with feeble ejaculatory vehemence, and dilate on the attributes of the Divine Being with mild insipid enthusiasm. There is a certain frothiness of devotional sentiment about them; the great lessons of the Great Master are *réchauffés*, and served up tepid: truths divine come any thing but mended from their tongues.

Scepticism is a word used for two very different attitudes of mind: for the temper which is unwilling to give its adhesion to any but the most definitely ascertainable certainties, and hangs long, perhaps ever, in doubt whether to believe or not in asserted truths. This is the scepticism of the intellect. But there is another, and one which justifies the odium which attaches to the word, that of the heart,—the scepticism which cannot rest in personal confidence when certainties are hidden from its

eyes ; which must have sight, and cannot walk by faith ; which, according to the characteristics of the minds in which it prevails, here grasps a negative, and there gives the welcome of unlimited credulity to the most unbased affirmatives. We have said of the demand which the spirit-seers make upon our faith for the acceptance of their revelations, that if we are to exercise faith in the matter, it must be a personal trust in the seers themselves. But they don't exactly mean to demand this,—what they really ask is, that we should have faith in asserted facts independently of the evidence ; they misuse the word, and simply under its sanction implore us to be credulous. It is curious to see these new revealers of hidden things declaiming against science and a scientific age. It is a scientific age ; and they are themselves the most remarkable proof of it, and the worst example of its worst tendencies. It is the worst tendency of too exclusive a devotion to science, that it tends to blind us to the truths of the heart, and leads us to rely too exclusively upon truths of the perceptions and the intellect ; and what is it but a shallow hungering after tangible certainties which leads men to ask for a knocking at the table to convince them that their dead relatives yet live, and movements of the elbow, or the whispered words of an angel, to assure them of the love of God and the beauty of holiness,—which leads them to “peep and botanise” on the grave, and to mistake in their eager credulity the pale meteors of the night for the shining through of the coming morning ?

Not that any one with a heart to feel, or an imagination to be moved, can in his deeper moods look with other than earnest solicitude, with awe and profound stirrings of the emotions, into the life that lies beyond, but we know not how close to this ; which must soon receive ourselves, and into which has already passed so much that seemed very part of our own being ; whose gates have been so often washed with our tears, and from

whose silence we have so passionately implored a sign. So passionately and so unavailingly ! For there are times when faith is weak, and the heart yearns for knowledge ; when it seems to us as if all hopes and fears were bound up around the insupportable longing for one gleam, however brief, of certainty to shine through the darkness. We know there is no answer to this cry, day by day climbing after the wings of death from many a desolated home. But is it meant to be indulged ? is what is denied to this supplication to be granted to a cold—and what we may even call, as it is sometimes manifested, a prurient—curiosity ? It is sometimes the hardest trial of human nature to rest upon the silence of God ; but is it better to do so, or to seek consolation in rapping of tables ? We have seen a woman gray with grief and years, who, having lost her children in early life, refused to leave her chamber, and devoted herself to the perusal of all the books which should solve the question of immortality, and give her a certainty that those she had lost yet lived. She pored incessantly in her solitary life over metaphysics and philosophy ; and the suns of many years rose on eyes quenched in tears, and a spirit in which hope gained no fresh ground against despair. Yet such an intellectual research is at least nobler than the shallowness which finds its certainty in its own or others' delusions, and exchanges the broad support of personal trust in the divine character for the feeble sustainment of these self-styled revelations, and will rather ask questions from some Transatlantic impostor than from the hopes and the affections implanted in our own hearts. We make no protest against the due acceptance of new facts. We assert of nothing in our relations to the spiritual world that it is impossible. Where there is truth, it is great, and will prevail. We desire only that facts should be dealt with as facts, and rigidly investigated. It is enough to say, as Lord Bacon says of the learning upon angels and spirits, that it is not deficient

in quantity, "but may rather be challenged in many of the writers thereof as fabulous and fantastical." What we protest against is the summons to acquiesce without evidence,—the confusion between moral faith and unfounded belief; we protest against credulity and the scepticism which allies itself so closely with it. We do but repeat what was said of old to those who distrusted the Son of Man, and asked for a miracle,—that it is the spirit of a faithless generation which seeks after a sign. And we cannot avoid here alluding to one almost universal feature of this class of writings, as another indication of mistrustfulness: this is, the excessive importance assigned to the letter of detached passages of Scripture, and the notion that if you get a bit of the Bible, you must be right, though you sever its connection and twist it from its meaning. Bibliolatry, like all other idolatry, is the offspring of a want of trust in higher things; and it is pitiable to see men, instead of striving to penetrate to the real meaning and true significance of the great record of God's dealings with man, hanging texts about their souls as if they were bladders, which could float them through the sea of doubts and uncertainties in which we struggle.

In the great and awful questions which have ever perplexed the human soul,—the conditions of the hereafter, and the prospect of the disencumbered spirit,—the attitude of trustful patience best becomes a man. It may be that some light will be given us in this direction even here, that some portion of the present field of our intuitions may be included within that of the intellect; and no man will wisely turn away from new light, if it only be light; but he who has observed how often in the history of the world such hopes have been disappointed, and how often false gleams have misled mankind, will be slow to believe that the curtain can be withdrawn; and though willing to receive at their full value any ascertained facts with which he comes in contact, will

rather choose to use his ignorance aright than to harass himself with fruitless efforts to investigate problems which both *à-priori* considerations and the experience of men lead him to believe are, for the present at least, beyond his solution. We repeat, that it is not to any special belief in particular phenomena we object: a man may have convincing evidence to his own mind for the appearance of ghosts, or the phenomena of clairvoyance, possibly even for the communications of spirits; but what we assail is, the spirit of distrust in the divine arrangements for the future, which displays itself in a pursuit after such things so eager as to overbalance the judgment; the faithless enthusiasm which snatches at these unascertained molecules of fact, as if they alone gave certainty, and were the true dependence for the mind,—as if by such slender and ill-knitted threads as these we hung suspended over the abyss of doubt and despair. We contrast the mind of a man who in the darkness submits to it, and feels his way along, in patient confidence that the night will pass, with that of one who snatches the flints from the ground, and strives to dispel the blackness by the evanescent sparks he can strike out,—the temper of him who when cast on the great sea, and the waters go over him, trusts the innate buoyancy of his frame and the sustaining power of the water, and thus floats in self-command upon the surface, with that of another, who snatches for support at every straw and fragment that floats within his reach.

We may well retort the reproach of those who claim a special interest in things spiritual. It is sometimes out of slowness to perceive what lies close around us that we go far to seek its imaginary likeness; like one who studies the affections in novels instead of exercising them in his home. Are we not all spirits in the flesh? Is not this world full enough of spiritual phenomena and spiritual realities? Are we, the units of homes, the citizens of states,—we who have the poor ever with us, and

who recognise ourselves and one another as the children of God,—are we so destitute of spiritual society, that we are driven to accept as a momentous addition to our knowledge these geometrical flower-drawings, nice little sermons, and cottage architecture of a little boy out of the body? Grant all his mixture of pretty filial tenderness, angelic Sunday-school teaching, and pleasant interest in heavenly toys, his lambs and golden ships with sails of purple silk, to be true, what does it advantage us? Our spiritual life is here; and it better becomes us to attend to it, and eat the bread of faith appointed for us, than to be hanging about the gates of the other world, stretching out our hands for eleemosynary scraps of information as to how life is conducted there.

And yet these people do claim to be the exponents of a revelation which in some special sense they call spiritual:—they, of whose position it is the very essence that they are discontented and unsatisfied with such revelations as the Eternal Spirit makes to the spirit of man, each man for himself in the silence of his own heart, as he is fitted to receive it for his own guidance, and only in its operation on his life and as transmitted through its operation in moulding his spirit capable of influencing other men; they, whose very distinction it is to require something different from this,—something they can see and hear,—who seek proof for the senses, and insist that the spiritual intercourse on which they pride themselves shall come through material vehicles, and be appreciable to the eye, the hand, or under its most refined conditions be whispered to the intellect!

It is a fact which ghost and spirit seers have too little considered, that it is the most spiritual minds which really concern themselves the least with external and sensible manifestations of things spiritual. The consciousness of their own hearts suffices them. They need not to go out of themselves, or to look beyond their living fellow-men, to be sensible of, and even to be oppressed

with, the vast significance, the ever-present reality, of that inner world in which our truest and deepest life lies hidden, and which the material universe, and the machinery of external life, cover, as the flame of the lamp covers the changes of the elements on which it feeds and by which it lives. The man from whom the secrets of his own heart are hidden, who has never felt profoundly that he himself is a living spirit, may put futile questions to the unanswering dead, and invoke the world-worn necromantic nostrum in some modern shape to solve his doubts and satisfy a vain curiosity. It is as if one in the valley should search with a telescope whether the wind blows on the mountain-top: he who stands there and feels it on his face is the better informed. Some men at least have known that there is such a thing as a spiritual influence on the human heart; and men who have been thus privileged will not confound knowledge about spirits with spiritual wisdom. Comparatively they will care little (even if they can be induced to believe it) that you may have such knowledge dictated to you by sitting passively with a pen in the hand, and that after a course of spirals your elbow and wrist will diverge into detailed information as to another state of existence.

History bears witness that the nations of the deepest spiritual convictions have least concerned themselves to discover or invent an airy world of spirit-life outside their own. The light Greek peopled the universe with finer existences than his own. Wood and mountain, sea and sounding shore, the streams and sloping pastures, were thronged and haunted by thin ethereal forms of beauty, the pregnant offspring of his wonder and his quick outward-working fancy. In high heaven he set the gods, corporeal deities, and gave a person and a life to every passion. All spiritual things froze in his hands into cold crystalline forms, like a glittering fretwork of ice along the side of running water. It was not love

of beauty, creative imagination, and subtle intellectual perception alone that made him figure love as a winged boy, and give to the sharp torments of remorse the shapes of women armed with scourges; it was an activity in these faculties disproportioned to his inner sense of the depth and reality of the things on which they laid hold. He was aware of, but was not absorbed into, that inner world in which they are realities,—

“The passion and the life whose fountains are within.”

It was a vividness of imaginative perception outbalancing the apprehension of feeling and experience. What nation has surpassed the Greek in subtle and refined speculations as to the nature of the soul, or turned so steady, keen, and scrutinising an eye on the profoundest recesses of our mental existence? Your modern seer loves to call Plato to witness to what his new supernatural informants have confided to him.

But the Hebrew, of a deeper, sombrer cast, whose character made him the fitting recipient of the great revelation that God is one and a Spirit,—poetic in temperament rather than in intellect,—could not escape the dread depths of his own nature, and found something there so awful and so real, that he was never tempted to make spiritual life the plaything of his fancy or the whetstone of his intellect. What the other looked outwards for, he felt within; the future, into which the other gazed so eagerly, he looked on with indifferent eye. The Athenian mind, straining on the highest wing of intellectual aspiration, grasped at some safe conviction of immortality as at a glorious yet half-elusive vision. The Jew rested on hope, or even with singular apathy passed the question by; and this probably arose, in part at least, from the fullness of the significance he gave to this present life, and the sense of immediate dependence and consciousness of actual intercourse so prominent in the Old Testament. He who wrote the eighty-eighth psalm,

with its terrible expression of the suffering of spiritual destitution, and its passionate implorings for *present* restitution on this side the grave, had too deep a concern with what now is to be busy with what lay beyond it, and needed to clear his spiritual eye no help from the Seeress of Prevorst, or the angelic class of informants :

“O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee :

Let my prayer come before thee : incline thine ear unto my cry ;

For my soul is full of troubles : and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

I am counted with them that go down into the pit : I am s a man that hath no strength :

Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more : who are out of remembrance, and they are cut off from thy hand.

Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, and in the deeps.

Thy wrath lieth hard upon me : and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves.

I am shut up and I cannot come forth. My sight faileth for very trouble : Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched forth my hands unto thee.

Wilt thou show wonders to the dead ? shall the dead arise and praise thee ?

Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave ? or thy faithfulness in destruction ?

Shall thy wonders be known in the dark ? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ?

But unto thee have I cried, O Lord ; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.

Lord, why castest thou off my soul ? why hidest thou thy face from me ?”

He who wrote thus, had learned in his anguish a truth which lies too often hidden from these people, who are so eager to pull down the heavens into our mortal sphere. He knew, he felt, that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. The soul that can sympathise, however faintly, with his experience, is not likely to become engrossed

with the floriculture, the architecture, and the costume of the future world ; even the classification of the angels does not interest it. Deeper things of the spirit than these are part of its every-day life.

FICTIONS FOR CHILDREN.*

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Books crowd the world to excess, and our children, like ourselves, suffer from plethora. Naturally omnivorous, they devour all that comes in their way, and as every uncle believes that a picture-book for the younger and a *novelette* for the elder scions is the most appropriate and improving present he can make, they are in general supplied with abundant provision for their indiscriminating appetites. It would be well, however, if we would enforce upon our children some degree of abstemiousness, and put some limit to their literary inquiries. Children naturally love clear images and distinct recollections, and, for the most part, they enjoy them; but it is possible to fill their minds with a confused medley of ideas, the chaotic residuum of all that has passed through their apprehensions;—where Aladdin and the Little Naturalist, Captain Cook and Cinderella, Moral Tales and the Habits of Monkeys, play their shifting parts, and mingle in inextricable entanglement. The enervation of the powers of attention and memory are not the only evils of allowing children constantly to turn to new resources instead of exhausting the old. It is scarcely a less evil that they never thoroughly know, and therefore never thoroughly enjoy, the best things which are set before them.

Any good work of art requires a very close famili-

* *The Rose and the Ring; or, the History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo. A fireside Pantomime for great and small Children.* By Mr. M. A. Titmarsh. London: Smith, Elder, and Co. 1855.

The King of the Golden River; or, the Black Brothers. A Legend of Styria. Illustrated by Richard Doyle. Second edition. London: Smith, Elder, and Co.

arity fully to taste or even fully to perceive its excellences. To appreciate Shakspeare or Homer, we must know them by heart, and even then we dare not flatter ourselves that much does not remain undiscovered, while the cursory glance of the amusement-seeker passes by unrecognised the most obvious beauties. There is a picture in one of our English galleries,—a Virgin and Child,—a plain, ungainly looking child it seems, with red hair and commonplace features. You pass it by; but it bears a great name—Leonardo da Vinci: look again; devote your best attention to it for half an hour; try to perceive whether the painter had a meaning,—whether his thought did or did not go beyond painting some everyday mother and child. Look deep enough, and you will see in that infant's face, which the artist scorned to endow with physical beauty, a depth of sweetness and dignity, the fullness of whose subtle manifestation you strive in vain to fathom, and you withdraw with the humble conviction that he whom a little while ago you could have criticised compendiously is greater than you, and that you must know his work far better yet before you can form any estimate of its worth. It is so with Nature; you must live with her if you would have your eyes unsealed. Who has not felt disappointed at the first view of the mountains? Who that has dwelt among them, that has seen them cradling the gray mists or sulled with purple storms, or has been startled, when snow has fallen in the night, to see them standing in their white and ghostly garments close about him, as if they had struck their tents and stolen nearer in the darkness, hemming him in, and in their passionless tranquillity making him feel the full meaning of that poet's phrase, "*the silence of the hills*:" who that has seen these, and such-like things, has been disappointed in the mountains? Who has not wondered to hear people speak of the monotony of ocean and the strange calm upon the spirits which the wide sea brings? Let him go to sea, not for a

day or for a week, but for a month, or for six months; let him see day after day the circular horizon and the vaulted blue, and night by night, as the great concave goes round, behold the climbing stars mount into the zenith, and descend and steep their shining heads in the waters, and by long familiarity he will learn something of the mystery of the "great sea."

All this is as true of a child's good story-book as of the masterpieces of art and Nature, and it is well to remember that what may appear superficial to us, may employ all his powers of cogitation, and furnish him with infinite suggestions. To oblige him, by a judicious course of restriction, to master a few good fictions adapted to the development of his capacity and imagination, so that he carries them whole in his mind, is to furnish him with an ever present source, not only of amusement, but of valuable exercise. And naturally this suits a child; he loves to be thoroughly at home with the incidents of his fiction, and will hear with ever fresh pleasure the constantly renewed tale; but the taste for constant novelty is very soon aroused, and once excited, is a spirit not easily laid.

But tales worthy of this intimate acquaintance on the part of children are not easily written. The very best are not those which have been expressly made for them, but such as have become their own by a gradual process of adaptation from the traditions and fanciful creations of bygone times. The imagination of a child is peculiar; it is narrow, because his knowledge is limited; it is dependent rather than creative; it requires to have an object brought before it; but it is disproportionately vivid, it confounds the borders of reality and fiction, it triumphs over the reason and the senses. I state impressively that I am a bear; I go down on my hands and knees, I affect a rolling motion, I growl horribly; the resemblance is remote, to say the best of it, and the child knows I am *not* a bear, but his imagination is too strong for him;

half in fun and half in fear he takes refuge behind the sofa, and if you push the joke too far, his fears master him, and he has recourse to tears to save himself from being devoured. From this vividness it comes that subtleties are lost upon a child; he is happier when his imagination has much to do than when all details of likeness are supplied. Betsy Jones, who keeps a shop supplied with broken crockery, dead leaves, and mud-pies, is enjoying herself as much as, and educating herself better than, Felicia, whose wax-doll takes her evening meal from an elaborate Lilliputian tea-service. Simplicity is the key-note to the mind of a child: he likes breadth and distinctness in his figures; he abhors fine distinctions; elaborate characters and finished incidents are a trouble to him. Let his *dramatis personæ* have a single trait each;—he loves, like Charles Dickens, to have a single characteristic by which he can lay hold of them as by a handle;—let their career be marked by sharp and well defined incidents;—let their fate be conclusive. Deal with him as he does with his painting, keep your colours bright and unmixed. Fear no iteration—it is a figure he loves. He is fond of details, but of a particular sort; not those accessory ones which go to furnish out with accuracy a complicated whole, but such as are complete in themselves,—clear, minute, distinct wholes. The distant landscape, with its blended *chiaroscuro*, its dissolving hues, its richness of varied form, is lost upon the child; the hue of a flower, the ripple of a brook,—these charm him: set him before the wild gray ocean, heavy with storm, and he gathers the shells at his feet. His sense of humour is developed before his taste for beauty, but you must be quaint, not witty, to please him. George Cruikshank is his artist, and he fails to appreciate Leech or Doyle. The child is constantly compared to a nation in its early stage, and with it he has much in common, but with the poor he has more: the simplicity of olden times—not that of morals, but that of ideas—

lingers in the bases of society ; they are the preservers of traditions, with which they have the most in common, and are the faithfulest depositories of the imaginative fictions of childhood. More cultivated minds appreciate these stories, but they cannot hold them and transmit them in their integrity ; the sameness annoys them ; they must retouch them here and there : they give them variety and complication, and thus they spoil them. Your boy prefers his nurse's version of the fairy-tale to your own ; she always puts in the same words in the same places, and that is a great matter.

Different nations have contributed in very different degrees to the nursery library, nor is it strange that Greece and Rome should have left us nothing. The Pantheon affords no very eligible society for children, and the sensuous yet cold beauty of Attic imagination is at once above and below the sympathy of the child. So the peopled shades are deserted, and the streams flow tenantless.

“ The lonely mountains o'er,
And the deserted shore,
A voice of sighing heard, and loud lament,
From haunted spring and vale,
Edged with poplar pale,
The parting genius is with sighing sent.
With flower-inwoven tresses torn,
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled
thickets mourn.”

Their literature has furnished nothing which in any degree of disintegration can supply food for children ; and we who have become so entirely dependent on books, feel puzzled to think on what the classical infant mind subsisted, or how, without their assistance, the little Cimon and Platos nurtured their dawning intellects. Æsop and Phædrus are no exceptions : the latter is but an earlier Gay or Lafontaine, and Æsop in all probability only a name under which fables, mostly of direct Eastern origin, passed current. At any rate, if they be al-

lowed to be all Greek by adoption, and some of them by invention, the only element which at all recommends them to children is the ascription to animals of the habits and reasoning powers of men. This pretty certainly came from the East. The Greeks very likely gave terseness and a keener sarcastic application to the fable; but this is the very thing that removes it furthest from the apprehension of the child; and though Æsop has been a good deal pressed upon the attention of "the youth of the British isles," we apprehend it has not been with much success: the pithy meaning in which the point of the story lies is lost upon him, and all that he cares for is any humour which may be embodied in the telling. Bewick's wonderful illustrations have a charm indeed; but they swamp the fable, moral and all; and all we care to know is, what that fox is saying to the lion, or why the kite in the ivied tree looks so very serious. The tales gather an interest as elucidating the pictures; and that is all. Fables are not milk for babes by any means. The Athenians and the French are not likely to have found pleasure in things suited to the capacities of children.

The East is used pretty freely and loosely as a last reference-place for every thing whose origin is unknown, but whatever portion of our fairy and romantic literature may more justly claim a native growth in the Celtic and Gothic mind, the *Thousand and One Nights* alone have furnished one of the most classical and inexhaustible reservoirs of youthful enjoyment. Yet these are rather for the schoolboy than the child. The main resources of the latter are drawn from a spring nearer home. It is the Teutonic race that has done more for the literature of the nursery than any other. There is a native sympathy that has given it this power. The German is still the intelligent child of Europe: his characteristic is a directness and unconscious simplicity; when he is affected his affectation is undisguised and transparent; his is not the *ars celare artem*, he cannot

be other than himself. The great Goethe himself, with his wisdom, his genius, his coldness, had this child-element, not in his heart, but in his intellect; his gaze on natural objects is like the searching of an intent and curious child; there is a childlike unconsciousness in his egotism, and in the minute detail of his own expositions of the mending of maps, the minutiae of processions, the arrangement of galas; in the deliberate complete way in which he says little things as well as great ones; in the patient attention he gives both in his philosophy and in his habits to the external accompaniments of a business through which an Englishman thrusts so negligently and impatiently to the heart of it. When in his old age he wrote a poem on a young lady he met at a watering-place,—his “newest dearest poem,”—Eckerman, who is another serious German child, tells us, “He had with his own hand copied these verses in Roman characters on fine vellum paper, and tied them with ribbon into a green morocco case; so that, from its garb, you might gather how decided was his preference for this poem.” Again, the German has little wit and much humour; how dull he is when he tries to be *spirituel*, how happy in a certain species of humour; that of the quiet quaint sort the child loves; not the English humour that makes character its subject, but that which deals more with comic appearances of things; which depends less on the person it is represented as springing from, and more on the situation in which he is placed, and which is on that account more easily appreciable by the child.

The German beast-stories are quite different from the Æsopian fable or the Eastern apologue. Reynard the Fox may have been originally a satire on priestcraft, but the humorous form in which it was embodied has long survived the sting; and the great mass of the charming stories, in which the Germans have mixed, with a delightful confusion of external traits yet a strict dramatic propriety of character, the demeanour and habits of men and

beasts, owe their distinguishing character to a pure love of that grave quiet tinge of the ludicrous that pervades them. They take the form of adventures alone, and though they may originally have had a purpose or a mythologic origin, the narrative and imaginative element has quite overgrown any such first nucleus, and if they, or the germs of them, ever came from the East, the Northern mind has given them a character of its own, and that which peculiarly fits them to charm the fancy of the child. Many Northern stories there are of clear mythological origin, though softened down in their transmission through the memory of the people into their present form. Those that bear the clearest evidence of this source are found in the greatest abundance where we should expect them,—in Norway and Sweden,—and though the beast-stories are not wanting there, they belong more strictly to Germany than Scandinavia. It is only about thirty years since English readers were introduced to the brothers Grimm's collection, by a translation which has ever since been one of the first favourites in every household. Several subsequent translations have appeared; and in 1853 Mr. Thorpe published a selection of the more northern tales, under the title of *Yule-tide Stories*, which bids fair to rival its prototype, though it lacks those inimitable illustrations which have contributed so much to the popularity of Mr. Taylor's translation. We estimate these and similar productions as among the most valuable additions which have been made of late years to our stock of children's fictions. Their preservation itself is sufficient evidence of the hold they take upon the imagination, and they are as simple and harmless as they are wild and humorous.

But we are just now more concerned with original productions. It would be a task far beyond our limits to give any general review of the vast number of these which have been produced with an increasing impetus during the last half-century, nor do we purpose to attempt any such

thing. One general leaning, however, may be observed ; it is the growing tendency to select the subject of the imaginative literature of children from matter closely approaching their own experiences, instead of widely apart from them. Modern stories are mostly written about modern children and modern men and women. 'This sort of child's fiction is not new, but it assumes a different form from that which it had in earlier times ; it is more familiar, more true to nature, less didactic, and gives employment to a higher range of ability. Above all, it is more introspective and sentimental. Our little grandfathers and grandmothers, who were taught to sit up straight in high-backed chairs, and said "Sir" to our great-grandfathers, and "Madam" to our great-grandmothers, who behaved politely in company, and wore quaint little coats and knee-breeches, or long stomachers and stays, and had their hair frizzed—were regaled, when they had any literature of this sort at all, with matter in accordance with their habits and appearance. Then the renowned Newbery or Mr. John Marshall, "Printer to the Society of LILLIPUTIANS, and Bookseller in ordinary to the GOOD CHILDREN of *Great Britain and Ireland*," produced the queerest tiny volumes, with ornamental speckled and gilt backs, and illustrated with little woodcuts, calculated to create inextinguishable laughter in modern minds, though no doubt deemed very fine in their day, and which give us a livelier idea of the figures presented by our progenitors in the domestic circle than any thing else in the world can do.

We wish it were in our power to reproduce some of these works *in extenso* ; but we cannot do more than attempt to give some idea of their contents, with which not many of the present generation are familiar. The real nursery-tales, the classics, were much the same then as they are now ; Jack the Giant Killer and Cinderella existed then as now in their best forms in oral tradition ; it is the modern tales of that day written expressly for

children that are so curiously contrasted with the analogous productions of our own time. They are highly moral, in intention at least, calculated to elevate and instruct, and there is no shilly-shallying with the subject, no sliding in of hints or refinement on motives—a good boy is a good boy, and a bad boy is a bad boy; the former attains to riches and honour, and in conjunction with a lovely partner, to a high state of domestic felicity; the vices of the latter turn upon him at every corner in life with a malignant perseverance of persecution that affords the most remarkable illustration of the doctrine that virtue is the only happiness, and ultimately lead him to the gallows. Thither he is accompanied by the tears of the virtuous associate of his early years, whose last triumph of discipline consists in refusing to tell a lie to save his unhappy friend.

In “The Friends,” however, “or the History of *Billy Freeman* and *Tommy Truelove*, proper to be imitated by all those who desire to be GOOD and GREAT,” a happy fate attends both the subjects of the memoir. Billy Freeman is a young gentleman who reaches the ripe age of four years utterly uninstructed in the very rudiments of learning, and might so have continued until gray hairs overtook him, “if an odd circumstance had not happened.” Visiting farmer Killbacon’s yard, the large dog Towzer pulled him “plump into the hog-trough;” and after he had recovered, with the assistance of Goody Killbacon, from the shock to his system occasioned by this distressing misadventure, he had scarce been in the place two minutes longer “before the turkeys got round him, and setting up their feathers hissed him quite out of the yard.” He is accosted by one of those benevolent gentlemen who make a point of riding by on these occasions, and who lays the matter at the proper door, by attributing the demeanour of the animals to their disgust at Master Freeman’s neglected education, and taking him home, so vividly stimulates his desire for information by the display

of a bookshelf filled with the "Universal Battledore" and other enticing books by Mr. Marshall, that he speedily masters the art of reading, and having been presented with a pony by his justly delighted father, "galloped away as merry as a grig, until he came to the academy which was kept by Mr. Alworthy." We are indulged with a picture of him mounted on a very stiff, strong-built horse, with a three-cornered hat on his head, and booted and spurred like the best; but the change in his appearance since his adventure at farmer Killbacon's makes it evident that the acquisition of the art of reading has cost him at least ten years of arduous application. Once at the academy, however, he makes rapid strides, and commences an intimacy with Tommy Truelove, who, being the best scholar there, can "read and write extremely well," and is "a young gentleman of the mildest aspect, and a proportionable sweetness of manners." The two exercise a most happy influence on those about them, "spending their vacant time in reading some instructive story to their schoolfellows," who, we cannot help regretting to state, spent their holiday-time gathered round to hear them. What shocking prigs the whole set would have appeared in the eyes of a modern schoolboy may be gathered from the following incident. "One time in particular as they were seating themselves, Master Ashton complained that his place was taken from him by Master Wills; this occasioned some disturbance; the latter pleaded his superiority of birth and fortune, the former his learning. Tommy Truelove then rose up and observed, that as they were there to amuse and instruct each other, it was a very improper time to argue points of precedence; yet, continued he, as you both seem resolved not to give up the point, let me beg of you to seat yourselves quietly a little, while I relate a story which has just occurred to my memory, that seems to suit the present quarrel very well." He proceeds to relate the story of the Basket-maker, with which we are all familiar, from *Sandford*

and Merton, and which establishes in the most undeniable manner the just precedence of learning over wealth and title, by showing that if a basket-maker and an effeminate nobleman are placed naked on a savage island, the former has it more in his power to propitiate the goodwill of the natives. But Master Truelove's application of his story and the happy effect of his eloquence is beyond all praise; and shows that if his studies had been limited to reading and writing, he had at least acquired the art of 'expressing himself with propriety.' " 'And now,' said Tommy Truelove, turning to Master Wills, 'let me ask you what you think of such an example, after you have compared the noble and amiable use of riches with the behaviour of such unnatural persons, who live as if they were born only for themselves, and set no other value on riches than as a means to indulge their passions, support their luxury, gratify their love of pleasures, a vain ostentation, or a restless curiosity; who are serviceable neither to their relations, their friends, nor their most ancient and faithful domestics; and who think themselves under no obligation by the ties of blood, friendship, gratitude, merit, or humanity? Even you, Master Wills, have been guilty of a breach of manners by behaving in such a manner as becomes not the meanest person, much more a young gentleman of your sense and education.' At this Master Wills, bursting into tears, confessed he had not any right to the place, as Master Ashton was older and a much better scholar than himself: he, therefore, asked his pardon, and embracing him, returned to his place."

Together the friends visited Mr. Freeman's house, and appear to have spent their time in discussions on morals and metaphysics. One day as they sat chatting together, they happened to fall into a discourse on gratitude, which Mr. Freeman overhearing, said, "There is not a more pleasing exercise of the mind than gratitude; it is accompanied with such an inward satisfaction, that the duty is sufficiently rewarded by the performance. It

is not, like the practice of many other virtues, difficult and painful, but attended with so much pleasure, that were there no positive command which requires it, nor any recompense laid up for it hereafter, a generous mind would indulge in it for the natural gratification which accompanies it: but, the better to illustrate what I have advanced on this subject, I will relate a circumstance I heard but a little while since." This circumstance consists in the adventure of a young lady, who, walking behind a merchant in the city of London, picked up a note for 50*l.*, which he let drop from his pocket, "and as she could read very well, soon discovered its value." Resisting the temptation to appropriate it, she returned it to the owner with a low curtsy; and added, "I am sure, sir, it is your property, as I saw it fall from your pocket." The gentleman, struck with the force of her reasoning, and pleased with her honesty and behaviour, desired to know how old she was, asked her name, where she lived, and of what business her father was, and minuting it down wished her a good-day; and, "I doubt not, was as much pleased with the genteel behaviour of this young lady as with having the note returned. However," adds the narrator, as if he himself had a little misgiving on this point, in which we cannot help sharing,—"however, we will return to the young lady: she went home, and related all that passed between the gentleman and herself to her father and mother; who, when they had heard it, embraced her, and called her their dear angel. 'Whatever you do,' said her mother, 'never be guilty of a dishonest action, how great soever the proffered advantage; but continue to walk in that path of rectitude you have ever trod, so shall we in our old age be blest in a child.' Three days had already elapsed before any thing happened to signify tidings of the merchant; but he being a man of a noble and generous disposition, and above suffering such a specimen of honesty to go unrewarded, sent, on the fifth day, a parcel directed for

Miss Betsey Watson, containing a large piece of the richest silk, and a letter, in which was enclosed a ten-pound bank-note. The contents of the letter were as follows :

“ ‘ MISS WATSON,—In justice to your exalted merit and virtue, herewith you will receive a piece of silk, a bank-note of ten pounds, and if you will leave your name at Mrs. Stirling’s in Cheapside, a suit of linen shall be made and sent agreeable to your taste.

“ ‘ I remain,

“ ‘ Most amiable young lady,

“ ‘ Yours,

“ ‘ UNKNOWN.’

“ She went the next day and left her name as directed by the letter, and in a week a handsome suit of linen was sent home ; which she now wears as a distinguishing mark of the merchant’s gratitude, and her own honesty.” Mr. Freeman draws rather too wide a deduction from his premises when he informs us that “ *Thus* will every one find the blessings that result from virtue.”

Tommy and Billy go to sea together, and fall into the hands of the captain of a slaver, who, on reaching his destination, orders them to wash and clean themselves in order to be sold with the rest of their countrymen. This brings out our friend Tommy in his finest vein of eloquence. “ Thunderstruck with this command, they burst into tears, when Tommy, falling on his knees, spoke to the Captain : ‘ O ! sir, if you have ever known the happiness of being a friend, of having a divine and spiritual relation of minds, and a harmony of designs and affections, which being founded on a known agreeableness, and entered into with a mutual hearty consent, grows up into the purest kindness and most endearing love,—have some compassion on us, for such we are—friends from our infancy : then let not your heart consent to commit an act of cruelty ; yet, if we must be sold, let us have one master, so shall we be happy even in our slavery.’ ”

Tommy on his knees before the pot-bellied Captain,

who is dressed in a cloak with a cocked hat and feather, and Billy with his handkerchief to his eyes vainly endeavouring to steady himself against the lurching of the vessel, present a truly moving spectacle, and Tommy's address would have touched a heart of stone. The Captain, "moved with this singular instance of friendship in two so young, and the supplicating posture they were in, consented to their request,"—and sold them both together. Happy, however, they were not, and weary of the toil of servitude, they determine on a common self-destruction, and accordingly go out into the woods armed with bows and arrows, with which they intend to stand opposite to one another, and thus "pierce each other's heart." They were in the very attitude, dressed in slashed Spanish trousers, and elaborate cloaks and doublets, when prudential motives intervened. "Billy cried, 'Stop: let us not take away that which, when once gone, cannot be recalled. Remember what my dear father said when we parted from him, *Never distrust Providence.*' Then Tommy, running to his friend, embraced him, saying, 'I likewise remember that piece of advice; let us desist then, my friend, from this cruel design.'" They do desist, and, falling into the hands of the Indians, are saved from destruction by an old chief, and treated with hospitality. A war breaking out with the English, their friend leads them to the edge of the camp, and Billy admitting that they should have "a just repugnance to the carrying of arms against those of their own country," the old chief becomes suddenly and strangely affected: "His eyes looked wild, but no tears came from them; little by little the violence of his agitation ceased; he grew calm, and, turning towards the east, pointed to the rising sun, and said to Tommy, 'Seest thou yon beauteous luminary, the sun in all its splendour? Does the sight of it afford thee any pleasure?' 'Undoubtedly,' answered Tommy [apparently with uncalled-for warmth]; 'who can behold so fine a sky without delight?' 'And yet to

me it no longer gives any,' said the savage. After pronouncing these few words, he turned to Billy, and, casting his eye on a bush in full flower, 'See,' said he, 'young man, does not that gay appearance of flowers give thee a sort of joy to look at it?' 'It does, indeed,' replied Billy. 'And yet,' said the old man, 'it delights not me!' adding, with some degree of impetuosity, 'Depart, haste,—fly to yon camp of your friends; get home, that your fathers may still see with pleasure the rising of the sun, and the flowers of the field.'"

Taking advantage of this pathetic overflow, Billy and Tommy (who, from some unexplained source, have resumed the attire of English youths, and furnished themselves with walking-sticks) return to their countrymen, and ultimately to their native shore. The family meeting is very affecting. "When Billy entered the town of his nativity, he said to his friend, 'It will not be imprudent for you to go first and gradually prepare my parents for my appearance, lest, if it should be too sudden, the joy may be more than nature is able to support.'" In accordance with this "not imprudent" suggestion, Tommy went first and broke the ice; and, on Mr. Freeman exclaiming, "'Let me behold him, and I am the happiest of men!'" stepped to the door and beckoned Billy, who came in; at the sight of him Mrs. Freeman cried, 'It is he! it is he!' and fainted away; Mr. Freeman exclaimed, 'What do I see? Is this my son?' 'I am that son,' said Billy, and embraced him. By this time Mrs. Freeman was recovered. It is impossible to describe the joy that was occasioned by so happy an event. The servants came running to see him, and in less than an hour all the people in the village were gathered round the house, crying out, 'Let us see Billy Freeman! the good, the kind and benevolent Billy Freeman!' He went out to them. At the sight of him all cried out, 'God bless you! God send you health and prosperity! huzzah!' . . . And why was all this? I will tell you. It was because a good boy was

returned to his parents : had he been a bad boy no one would have taken any notice of him." Thus, Billy Freeman had his reward, and the two families of the Freemans and Trueloves "all lived in the most perfect friendship, nothing being wanted which could in the least contribute to their felicity."

To wind up all, we are furnished with an Essay on Friendship, "written by an ingenious and celebrated young lady," who provides a mass of dissertation somewhat wide of the mark, and embodying precepts like the following : "We should endeavour as much as possible to keep company with those who are above us. There we rise as much as we sink with people below us. By people above us, we are not to understand with regard to birth, that is the least consideration ; but with regard to their merit, and the light in which the world considers them. The pride of being the first in company is but too common, but it is exceedingly silly and prejudicial. Nothing lets down a character more than that wrong and ridiculous turn. Knowledge will introduce a man, and good breeding will endear him to the best companies. The scholar without good breeding is a pedant, that is, a person who, having a stock of learning, carries or behaves himself so disagreeably, by making unseasonable and misapplied criticisms, that his company is quite troublesome, and, instead of being instructive, is contemptible—the philosopher is churlish and obstinate, the soldier a brute, and every one disagreeable !" And with this somewhat warm peroration the history concludes. It is puzzling to ascertain the exact age at which it is intended to be read. Its form and its commencement seem adapted to about the age of seven years, but the style grows with the growing years of the heroes, and the final essay is evidently addressed to the man of fashion and the philosopher.

Good manners, in the moral lessons of those days, form one of the main essentials of the virtuous charac-

ter. Very good things they are, no doubt ; but though we cannot help regretting that "pretty behaviour" is extinct, and unrestrained license has superseded the old code of infantile politeness, still we can hardly say that we should wish all children to be such stuck-up formal little chits as the Miss Townsends, in that valuable story entitled the "Consequences of good and dutiful Behaviour." These young ladies, the elder of whom was aged six years, having been invited to visit Mrs. Offley, "came, and with curtseys took their leave, and asked their mamma if she had any commands." Arrived, "they walked into the house, where the servant introduced them to Mrs. Offley, to whom they paid their compliments in the prettiest manner imaginable. Miss Harriet, who was the elder, and about six years of age, then helped her sister to pull off her things, which they laid down with great care. On Miss Offley's coming into the room, they paid their respects to her in the same manner. Soon after the door again opened, and Miss Gresham appeared, her maid with her."

Miss Gresham is the awful example in the piece, an "idle, obstinate, and disobedient miss," who that very morning, when her attention ought to have been devoted to her reading, had burst out with, "Look, mamma, there's the cat on the wall;" and absolutely, on her introduction to Mrs. Offley, "required to be reminded" by her maid to hold up her head. Those little Pharisees, Miss Townsend and Miss Charlotte, "observed Miss Gresham with concern, and wished to see her behave better." Invited into the other room, "Miss Gresham immediately started from her chair, and was rushing out of the room, when she was stopped by Miss Offley, who desired her to observe how the Miss Townsends retired. She made an awkward curtsy, not showing a desire of imitating the young ladies' graceful manner, and then ran out, jumping, and setting up her shoulders. Miss Townsend and Miss Charlotte walked upright and properly with Miss Offley ; they

observed the pictures, found out the likenesses, and seemed much pleased with them. Miss Gresham paid no attention to any thing; and when they went into Mrs. Offley's chamber, strided up two or three stairs at a time, or crept on her hands and knees. Miss Townsend admired the pleasantness of the room, observed it was very light to read or work in; 'and how very entertaining is it,' said she, 'to see the number of people passing about!' Miss Charlotte then opened a large Bible which lay upon the table, and finding a print of Joseph and his brethren in Egypt, 'Oh, sister!' she cried, 'do but see how overjoyed this good Joseph looks! I am sure he loves all his brothers, though they have been so cruel; and how he hugs Benjamin! Then do but see how ashamed the naughty brothers look! Ah! you may well hang down your heads; and yet, as Joseph forgave them, I should not be angry with them; they were sorry, I believe, for their fault, and they could do no more than ask pardon and resolve to amend.' Miss Townsend kissed her sister for her remark, and looking at the print of Job sitting upon the dunghill, 'Poor man,' says she, 'how much he suffered! but he was good; and God Almighty let him be tried with afflictions, that he might show he could do his duty in every state of life in which it pleased Providence to place him.'" After this and much more of the same kind we are not surprised to learn that "these amiable girls took a most genteel leave of Mrs. and Miss Offley;" and that the former said to them, "My sweet young ladies, wherever you visit you confer a favour."

Harriet Howard, aged seven, has accomplished manners, but wants "discernment," and "measures her respect to company and strangers by their dress and consequence in the world. It is no matter whether you are amiable or accomplished; *affluence*, and an exalted station, are, in her opinion, sufficient to compensate for the want of these and every other internal ornament." Having been betrayed into attentions to a finely-dressed

lady's-maid, she "deals out very severe invectives against the servants for exposing her, by their blunders, to a situation so truly humiliating to one of her haughty spirits." This is not unlike many modern Harriets, we dare say; but we do not now describe them thus: and if we did, children would not understand us; but we are not to suppose these sorts of books were thus unintelligible to the children for whom they were written; they were accustomed to this sort of language in conversation. Captain Sandford, we venture to say, is not misrepresented when he is described as stating to his friend that "travel is certainly pleasing to an inquisitive and speculative mind; but even this, like other things, has its inconveniences." The power of making this sort of observations was valued; and we apprehend it is not impossible that Colonel T—— may have taken occasion on the sight of an ungoverned horse to inform his little son upon the government of the passions, and really have told him that "it is in vain to resist when pleasure and opportunity solicit, for, unless your inclinations be subdued by the constant discipline of reason, they will not obey her voice when they become furious and importunate."

Mrs. Hofland, who continues popular, has brought something of this style down to our own time. Yet she too, we apprehend, is declining from her zenith; the deliberate sesquipedalian manner has now few votaries. Nevertheless, its pompous periods and studied inculcation of morals are far from being so distasteful to children as those who judge for them are apt to imagine. A child loves directness, and profits by it. A great deal has been said about the foolishness of troubling children with moral stories, and the superior advantages of the old pure imaginative fictions; but the least profitable reading of all to a child is that where the author attempts to slip in his moral unperceived, and by a sly sidewind to influence the character of his reader. This is lost labour; it may spoil the story, but we doubt if it ever benefits the child.

We opine that moral stories *are* good things in their place, but that the story should then be devoted to its purpose, and the exposition be as plain and direct and forcible as possible. Children like this: they even liked a book in which it was carried to the last extreme. The *Elements of Morality* was once popular. It was a translation from the work of an amiable German clergyman, who rivals those he writes for in the unhesitating confidence with which he simplifies the philosophy of education, and in the sanguine anticipations he forms of the benefits to spring from his work. "Receive now," he says, "respectable parents, this book, with my sincere wish, that it may produce much comfort in your families. Great, inexpressibly great, would be my reward, if it prove half as useful as I intended it to be—if it prevent, or root out of our little posterity, the number of prejudices which prey like poisonous insects on human happiness—if it excite in them a love for virtue and a detestation for every thing mean and vicious." His system is to "determine a child's disposition." He has discovered that it is not enough to acquaint a child with the "distinguishing characters" of a particular affection—you must do more, you must show him its "effects"—and that will at once determine his disposition in regard to it. "Teach him that envy is the vexation which is felt at seeing the happiness of others, you will have given him a just idea of it; but show him its dreadful effects in the example of Hannah, chap. xxix. vol. ii., who was so tormented by this corroding passion at her sister's wedding, that she could neither eat, drink, nor sleep, and was so far carried away by it, as to embitter her innocent sister's pleasure; this representation has determined the child's disposition—he will hate envy." From a picture of "Brown, who was a very idle man," he promises himself still more conclusive effects, if that be possible, and his book consists of all manner of incidents most barefacedly adapted to exemplify the good consequences of good

manners and morals. It is overwhelmed with a sermonising element, yet, in spite of this, children found it interesting, on account of that very directness which to us makes it ridiculous.

The modern child's fiction is in the other extreme, and we doubt if it be a better one. It is simply a little novel, narrowed and enfeebled to suit the capacities for which it is intended, but not less carefully contrived to carry on attention without effort, to please an indolent imagination, and, above all, pleasantly to titillate the finer affections; all reflections are dispensed with that might interfere with the flow of the narrative, or require, what must always be disagreeable, an exercise of the young reader's mind: all is subordinated to a pleasing and refined dissipation. It is true that such books contain many charming and touching pictures of the loveliness of the affections, the triumphs of Christian patience, and the beauty of self-denial. But we doubt whether the constant exhibition of these virtues in fictional narrative has any very improving effect on character; on the contrary, it may be forcibly urged, that habitually to stimulate the affections and the conscience without providing them a field for practical exercise, must inevitably enervate their vigour. The virtues most dwelt on in these works are too much of one kind, and the exclusive contemplation of them is too softening. Patience, a loving temper, and an unquestioning submission to the will of Providence, are not necessarily inconsistent with indolence, effeminacy, and the absence of active faith. It may be safely asserted that the exhibition of the play of the sentiments occupies much too large a space in the writings now devoted to the use of the young. The heart of a child rarely needs stimulating, and it is better to train its affections in the discipline of its home than to excite them through the medium of the imagination; a larger portion of its reading would more wisely be devoted to something which tends to exercise concentration of

attention and some degree of thought, or to such works of pure imagination as stand quite apart from its own experiences.

To write new purely imaginative tales fitted for children is perhaps as difficult a task as a man of genius can propose to himself. Not many men are so constituted that they can give free scope to their powers, and at the same time move within the circle of the sympathies of a child. Some who might have the power, have not the singleness of purpose which is necessary. Many books ostensibly written for children, are spoiled because the author always has a side-glance at a wider audience. The possible verdict of an adult reader exercises a disturbing influence on his work, his subject no longer possesses his mind in its integrity, and he deserves to fail, as he almost inevitably does, not because a work must be written expressly for children in order to suit their wants, but because a man cannot without confusion undertake a work of art from two different points of view. *Gulliver's Travels* were written for men; their humorous and minute detail, and the accident that, in the case of the Lilliputians and Brobdignagians, the incidents were peculiarly calculated to strike the fancy of children, has made these their universal admirers. Had Swift allowed the possibility of a juvenile audience to influence his work, it would have pleased less both man and child. In tales of sentiment and little moral stories, a single-minded adaptation to the position of the child is not difficult; such works too are most commonly produced by women in the closest sympathy with childhood: but lofty genius, in a man especially, must be instinct with something higher than itself before it can devote its loftiest powers in all simplicity to the wants of little children.

If Mr. Ruskin's story of the *King of the Golden River* be not in *every* respect adapted to become a favourite with children, it is not for want of genuine simplicity in the mood of the author. It is impossible to

read it without feeling that it is the work of an artist true to himself, and who allows not, and feels no temptation to allow, any secondary objects to obtrude themselves upon him in the creation of his work. You may read this singleness in the very flow of the narrative, in the clear undisturbed harmony of the style ; it throws a grace over the whole, like that inscrutable beauty of expression that plays in the features of a good man. Mr. Ruskin has genius and is true to it, and thus he has written a little book which will always have a charm both for young and old. But, successful as he must be allowed to have been, his genius is not such a one as is most exactly adapted to strike in with the requirements of children. His imagination is somewhat too complex, his sympathy is too little with the simple aspect of things, it is not his disposition to find his satisfaction in the everyday features of Nature. He visits Beauty in her palaces, and loves her best in her richest attire, clad in the morning mists among the hills, or informing the shadows of a Gothic cathedral ; and, as such things are among the last to the appreciation of which the unformed imagination of a child attains, he will often find the conceptions and descriptions of such a mind too much in advance of his stage of development. Hans' visit to the cataract with holy water, which he is told will turn the river into gold, may serve to illustrate our view. The description is unrivalled for delicacy and gorgeousness ; but few children, we apprehend, could follow it, scarcely even find pleasure in the attempt :

“ It was, indeed, a morning that might have made any one happy, even with no Golden River to seek for. Level lines of dewy mist lay stretched along the valley, out of which rose the massy mountains—their lower cliffs in pale gray shadow, hardly distinguishable from the floating vapour, but gradually ascending till they caught the sunlight, which ran in sharp touches of ruddy colour along the angular crags, and pierced, in long level rays, through their fringes of spear-like pine. Far above shot up red splintered masses of castellated rock,

jagged and shivered into myriads of fantastic forms, with here and there a streak of sunlit snow, traced down their chasms like a line of forked lightning ; and far beyond, and far above all these, fainter than the morning cloud, but purer and changeless, slept, in the blue sky, the utmost peaks of the eternal snow. The Golden River, which sprang from one of the lower and snowless elevations, was now nearly in shadow ; all but the uppermost jets of spray, which rose like slow smoke above the undulating line of the cataract, and floated away in feeble wreaths upon the morning wind."

In the same way the thought or moral on which the second half of the story turns, though in its essence quite *intelligible* to a child, cannot with equal justice be said to be perfectly *suited* to its comprehension. Gluck succeeds by giving all his water away, and remonstrates against the fate incurred by his brothers.

" 'Why,' said Gluck, 'I am sure, sir—your majesty, I mean—they got the water out of the church font.'

'Very probably,' replied the dwarf; 'but,' and his countenance grew stern as he spoke, 'the water which had been refused to the cry of the weary and dying is unholy, though it had been blessed by every saint in heaven ; and the water which is found in the vessel of mercy is holy, though it had been defiled with corpses.' "

Mr. Ruskin has a tendency to view his subject somewhat too purely in its aspect of beauty to fit him for becoming a first favourite with children ; still he is not without humour ; and the genuine delicacy and grace that every where characterise his writing, cannot be without their effect in refining and elevating the taste of those who come under their influence. Nor are those pains unworthily bestowed that are spent in sedulously watching and educating the tastes of a child,—they form through life an invisible outer fence which almost unconsciously wards off temptations, which if they could strike full at the more tangible ramparts of principle, might make their way in, or cost at least a struggle which would leave a shadow over the first brightness of purity.

The reverse of good taste must be predicated of Mr. Thackeray's Christmas story, which will neither serve its purpose nor add to the reputation of its author. We are happy to think it will not greatly please many children. There are some whom it may, but to them it can do little harm. They have little of the bloom of childhood to be impaired. They are weary of balls, of theatres, of puppet-shows; they have waltzed, they have flirted, they have supped; they are *blasés* at four years old, and satiated with literature at seven, and may lay Mr. Thackeray's book down with a yawn of approval like that of the weary novel-grinder of fifty, when she declares that the *Heir of Redclyffe* is "a pretty book." They, perhaps, can appreciate his satire and his parodies, pronounce judgment on the appropriateness of his footmen's dialect, and enjoy the thorough child-about-town air of which the whole is redolent. The affectation of fineness is the weakness most disagreeable in Mr. Thackeray, and so strong is his recoil from it, that he has come to consider it simplicity and good manners to be vulgar. He is like a schoolboy who thinks he must be rude to his sisters to show his manliness; and so assiduously and unremittingly has he devoted himself to hunting out and gibbeting the weaknesses of footmen and the vulgarity of "snobs," that his genius has become, like the dyer's hand, subdued to the element it works in. There is a vulgarity of false assumption which offers a fair and tempting subject to the satirist; there is also a vulgarity *per se*. Nothing is easier and falser than to condemn refinement as affectation, and to assume the absence of it as an indication of candour and high principle, just as some years ago it was the fashion to represent prodigality and recklessness as the invariable symptoms of benevolence and generosity of disposition. The model Prince Giglio is an extremely vulgar and stupid young man, and his exquisite burst of honourable feeling at the end is more out of place than Charles Surface's refusal to sell his old uncle; for la-

vishness has some affinity with kindliness of disposition, whereas coarseness of grain has none with a quick and strong sense of personal honour. It is not impossible for the two to be found together; but we must not be supposed to agree with our author in esteeming the particular exhibition of a nice sense of honour displayed by Prince Giglio to be worthy of the grand *dénouement* of fairy approbation which it obtains. A man who has been cheated out of his signature to a promise of marriage by an old woman who tells him it is an order for coals, and thinks it his duty to desert his bride at the altar in order to be faithful to such an engagement, is not honourable; he is simply a fool.

It is not easy to draw the line where refinement becomes false by overstrained conventionalities, or where, on the other side, the neglect of it melts into vulgarity; but the distinction is as true as that between the kindred manifestations of physical beauty and ugliness; and the presence of the one or the other is more easily appreciable by a cultivated taste than capable of demonstration to the understanding. It might not be very difficult to prove by reasoning that the style which Mr. Thackeray deems adapted to children is vulgar, and debasing as far as utterly false taste is debasing; but the instincts of his readers will be a far shorter, and not less just, means of conviction. This is how lovers quarrel in the *Rose and the Ring*:

"Giglio said, 'O Angelica, Angelica, I didn't think this of you. *This* wasn't your language to me when you gave me this ring, and I gave you mine in the garden, and you gave me that k—'

But what k— was we never shall know, for Angelica, in a rage, cried, 'Get out, you saucy, rude creature! How dare you to remind me of your rudeness! As for your little trumpery twopenny ring, there, sir, there!' And she flung it out of the window.

'It was my mother's marriage-ring,' cried Giglio.

'I don't care whose marriage-ring it was,' cries Angelica. 'Marry the person who picks it up, if she's a woman; you shan't

marry *me*. And give me back *my* ring. I've no patience with people who boast about the things they give away! I know who'll give me much finer things than you ever gave me. A beggarly ring indeed, not worth five shillings!

Now Angelica little knew that the ring which Giglio had given her was a fairy ring: if a man wore it, it made all the women in love with him; if a woman, all the gentlemen. The Queen, Giglio's mother, quite an ordinary-looking person, was admired immensely while she wore this ring, and her husband was frantic when she was ill. But when she called her little Giglio to her, and put the ring on his finger, King Savio did not seem to care for his wife so much any more, but transferred all his love to little Giglio. So did every body love him as long as he had the ring; but when, as quite a child, he gave it to Angelica, people began to love and admire *her*; and Giglio, as the saying is, played only second fiddle.

'Yes,' says Angelica, going on in her foolish ungrateful way, 'I know who'll give me much finer things than your beggarly little pearl nonsense.'

'Very good, Miss! You may take back your ring, too!' says Giglio, his eyes flashing fire at her; and then, as if his eyes had been suddenly opened, he cried out, 'Ha, what does this mean? Is *this* the woman I have been in love with all my life? Have I been such a ninny as to throw away my regard upon *you*? Why—actually—yes—you are a little crooked!'

'O, you wretch!' cries Angelica.

'And, upon my conscience, you—you squint a little!'

'Eh!' cries Angelica.

'And your hair is red—and you are marked with the small-pox—and, what? you have three false teeth—and one leg shorter than the other!'

'You brute, you brute, you!' Angelica screamed out: and as she seized the ring with one hand, she dealt Giglio one, two, three smacks on the face, and would have pulled the hair off his head had he not started laughing, and crying,

'O dear me, Angelica, don't pull out *my* hair, it hurts! You might remove a great deal of *your own*, as I perceive, without scissors or pulling at all. O, ho, ho! ha, ha, ha! he, he, he!'

And he nearly choked himself with laughing, and she with rage, when, with a low bow, and dressed in his court-habit, Count Gambabella, the first lord-in-waiting, entered and said, 'Royal Highnesses, their Majesties expect you in the Pink Throne-room, where they await the arrival of the Prince of CRIM TARTARY.' "

This, or worse, is the general tenor of the work, interspersed with burlesque passages, such as Mr. Thackeray pretty well satiated the public with in "Rebecca and Rowena." In that, however, there was the point of a specific parody, which is here wanting. Children will read this, as they will any thing that is not insufferably prosy; but we apprehend that those whose tastes are not already a good deal injured will better like better things, and we are not without a hope that to most of them it will appear dull. Persons of sense, however, will not, we think, give their children the opportunity of pronouncing an opinion upon it. Mr. Thackeray mistakes the bent of his genius very much when he undertakes to write for children. His is no food for young rosy lips, but stimulative diet for jaded appetites. Of course even the present work is not without his peculiar cleverness, but all who are familiar with his vein will understand that his humour is not of a kind to be very readily appreciated by those for whom it professes to be written. The joke of the book consists in attributing to the Royal Families of Paflagonia and Crim Tartary the slang language and slang habits of modern society, and representing them with the foibles and habits of that portion of the middle class which the author loves best to caricature. This is interspersed with passages of pantomime bombast, the aim apparently being to sound the depths of absurdity. But utter absurdity must be very nicely managed not to degenerate into trash. Mr. Lear has written and illustrated a "Book of Nonsense" which every one knows and every child delights in. It has not a grain of sense either in the letter-press or the illustrations from cover to cover, yet it has good taste, good fun, and pleasant humour. If Mr. Lear's success shows that it is possible to dispense with the assistance of sense, Mr. Thackeray's attempt is a warning, on the other hand, that it is a dangerous experiment to make.

CHILDREN'S FAIRY-TALES, AND GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.*

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ENGRAVING is a limited field, but these limited fields of art often afford scope for the display of a special genius which would nowhere else have found opportunity for its development. Where the engraver occupies himself merely in reproducing the original works of others, however exquisite may be his mechanical skill, and however nice and accurate his perceptions, he is certainly on quite another level than the painter or the sculptor. Where, however, the engraver, using the word in its widest sense, chooses to make his graver the instrument for developing his own conceptions, he is truly an artist, and may find in his peculiar mode of execution an expression peculiarly suited to his genius. Two names will occur to every mind, of men who have found their fittest field in this peculiar corner of art. Bewick and Cruikshank, both men of true genius, felt that Nature meant them neither to draw nor to paint, but to engrave. Those vignettes to the "Birds" or to "Æsop's Fables" could never have been painted. Colour could have added nothing to those quaint little touches of the grotesque and humorous ; it would have ruined them. Think of the one where that intent kitchen-maid is pegging up her clothes on the drying-line ; she is wrapt up in the occupation of the moment, but has unfortunately left the garden-gate open, and the denizens of the farmyard are deliberately tres-

* *George Cruikshank's Fairy Library. Hop-o'-my-Thumb and the Seven-League Boots. Jack and the Bean-stalk.* London, David Bogue. 1854.

passing on the clean linen spread on the grass. The air with which a contemplative and self-absorbed sow is walking over the white sheets, the haste with which her numerous family are rushing to join her, the triumph of a cock who has contributed his little *quotum* of damage, the pleasure the inspector of the cut has in the sense of being so much behind the scenes, his feeling of the nearness of the *dénouement*, make the whole thing exquisitely ludicrous. But fancy it in oils, on canvas four feet square—it would be a palpable absurdity, like putting a pinch of snuff in a carved oak chest.

Cruikshank is inferior to Bewick in the amount of his originality. He is content to illustrate the ideas of other people, but he does it as only a man himself possessed of the nicest and most genial sense of humour could do. The oldest jokes, under the touch of his pencil, come back to us with fresher and profounder suggestions of the ludicrous: a new and complete edition of "Joe Miller," illustrated by George Cruikshank, would be at once one of the most original and entertaining books ever seen. Yet what a peculiar world he moves in. Even when most serious, these are not exactly men and women that he draws; they are a creation of his own—George Cruikshank's men and women. The heroine, the young lady with the red hair (you know it is red hair), the long but good nose, the red and white complexion, the small waist and very stiff stays; the hero, with the long fair locks, those good legs, and the sweet tempered, feeling, intelligent face, with such healthy animal spirits,—who ever saw such people? Yet who but has felt the perfection with which they illustrate Fielding and Smollett. He was never meant to portray nicety of character—Sophy Western and Amelia are beyond him—but this is Jones, and Booth, and Peregrine Pickle to perfection. These are his Adam and Eve, an ideal of his own, based on a real germ of the Londoner of the beginning of this century; but standing for hero and heroine of all ages, from

Hans in Luck down to Oliver Twist, to our everlasting contentment. And how these two figures in their sameness set off the eternal variety in the humorous images that surround them ! Humphrey Clinker shocking the delicate Miss Bramble ; the doctor and the painter in the hands of Peregrine ; the imperturbable face of the deaf postillion, jogging away with pole and splinter bar from the broken-down chaise, while the wretched lovers scream in vain from either window,—how could he hold his graver steady while he drew all these things and a thousand more ?

But apart from caricature, a field we will not touch on, it is in the illustration of fairy-stories that George Cruikshank specially shines. The pictures to the original edition of "Grimm's German Stories" are very wonderful efforts ; the most matured mind may derive pleasure from them, and children take a deeper impression from them than those about them have much idea of. Ask any man of thirty who read the book at ten, whether he remembers the pictures—ask him if he remembers the stories they illustrated—see, then, if he remembers the stories which were not illustrated. What boldness there is in these little cuts, what reliance on the simple faith of those who are to scrutinise them !—who else would have dared to make a man ride on a fox as he does, sitting firmly on the outstretched tail ? It is the only way, when you come to consider it, a man could ride a fox.

"And away they went over stock and stone
Till his hair whistled in the wind."

You see it in that little bit of a cut two inches square ; you see in the man's face that the wind is blown down his throat, and he can hardly catch his breath : what a fearful pace the old fox is going at ; and yet there is no sense of insecurity—his rider sits there as steady as a rock, only holding rather anxiously on to his cap, whose feather, like his hair, is whistling in the wind.

How old is George Cruikshank? He amused us as children, and now he comes forward again with a *Fairy Library* to amuse our children! Might he be as immortal as his works will be! But, alas, the first touch of age is on him—you see it in these works. There is no weakness, no infirmity; but with a softened and far more finished execution, there is a want of the vigour and vivid character of his earlier productions. The prints are many of them strikingly beautiful, but the giants and ogres, still wonderful, are not quite what they once would have been; the difference is scarcely perceptible—it is a gray hair in a brown head; still there are signs that appropriateness and delicacy of finish have begun to encroach a little too far on vividness of conception: but the old fire is still bright, the dwarf under the table in “Jack and the Bean-stalk” could have been portrayed by no other hand; and there is enough in all the pictures to make them a treasure-house of delight for children.

But there is a serious point in which George Cruikshank has departed from that good sense which must, one would think, be inherent in the man who can draw as he does. He has undertaken to write the stories as well as illustrate them, to re-write the tales of our childhood, and to make “Hop-o’-my-Thumb,” “Jack and the Bean-stalk,” and the rest, subservient not only to sound morality, but to political economy, abolition of capital punishment, temperance, peace, and the sanitary movement. He informs us that the story of “Puss in Boots” “is but a succession of successful falsehoods,—a clever lesson in lying,—a system of imposture rewarded by the greatest worldly advantages! A *useful* lesson, truly, to be impressed upon the minds of children.” With equal severity he convicts Hop-o’-my-Thumb of the murder of the ogre’s children, stamps him in italics as an “*unfeeling artful liar and a thief*,” and has scarcely words or signs of exclamation enough to stigmatise his parents as *receivers of stolen goods*. “A father and a mother, of

noble blood too, encouraging a young child" (and such a small one too) "in *thieving*, and at once, without hesitation, *appropriating* the produce of *his robbery* !!!" The history of "Jack the Giant Killer," he tells us with tears in his eyes, is "little more than a succession of slaughterings and bloodshed;" and as to Jack's feat with the hasty-pudding, which has always been looked on as his *chef d'œuvre*, he strongly maintains that the "shocking and disgusting result thereof," *i. e.* the giant's ripping up his "*real* stomach," is "neither *useful* nor *innocent*." In his own stories, Mr. Cruikshank has reformed these matters altogether; he has done away with capital punishments for giants, and enacted the Maine Law through all the realms of fairy-land. Look at this heart-rending finale to "Hop-o'-my-Thumb,"—that he who, as all authentic history informs us, lived happily till he died, should have been involved in the anxieties and labours connected with this extensive system of reforms, carried out apparently in the paternal spirit of Joseph of Austria,—this is a sad subject of contemplation, and would be doubly so if children were in any danger of attaching ideas to this part of the work:

"The first act of the Count as Prime Minister was to advise the sending an army to take all the Giants and Giant-Ogres in the land prisoners, which was done. And instead of putting them to death, he turned their enormous strength to useful purposes, and employed them, under guards, at different places where great national works and improvements were required,—such as new roads, draining marshes, and making harbours of refuge and security for ships. And he let them have their wives with them, who, although Giantesses, being of a more gentle nature, soothed and controlled the fierce and savage nature of their husbands; and thus made them more manageable and useful to the country. The next thing the Count did, having suffered so much in himself and family from the scarcity of food, was to pass a law to admit foreign grain into their markets, which had not been allowed before. The Count, having experienced the evils arising from gambling and betting, passed a law that the winner in either of these cases should always pay to the State,

for the support of the poor, *double the amount of his winnings*; and this soon put a stop to betting and gambling entirely. Finding that strong drinks were hurtful to all, and that they created a great deal of misery and all sorts of wickedness, his next act was to pass a law to abolish the use of all intoxicating liquors; the effect of which law was, that in a short time there were very few, if any, criminals in the land; and the only paupers, or really poor, were those sick or aged persons who are unable to do any sort of work, for all the people in the land were industrious, and the country was rich. The last great law that he made was, that every child in the land should be educated, either by its parents or the State; that *all* should be taught to read and write."

This blow at the old associations of our childhood is the more painful because it comes from so unexpected a quarter. What! George Cruikshank—associated with the purest and most delightful real fairy-stories; he from whom we learnt what an elf really was by the picture of that one putting on his breeches in the shoemaker's shop; he but for whom our ideas of Rumpelstiltskin would have been as vague and unsatisfactory as they are now precise and clear—*et tu Brute?*—he to mangle our old traditions, to murder "Hop-o'-my-Thumb" with an anti-capital-punishment dagger, and to carve him as a dish fit for "the three Quakers who went to Russia"!

Where is this to end? We see no reason in the present limits. If it is wise to instruct children from five to twelve years of age in the political and social movements of the day, and to do it through the medium of nursery-tales, at least let it be done thoroughly. Let a political meaning pervade the story. Let a child be made to perceive that the famous dog of "Mother Hubbard," in his eccentric changes of mood, aptly typifies the political career of Mr. Disraeli; and let the author venture on prophecy so far as to make the official cupboard bare at the end as well as at the beginning of life. Let the "Babes in the Wood" be the Protectionist party, and the late Sir Robert Peel the cruel uncle. Mr. Roebuck, we have no doubt, would cover them with leaves, though

not in quite so pious a spirit as the real robin. Let us have "Bob the Corn-Law Repealer" instead of "Jack the Giant Killer," and let Mr. Bright eat the hasty-pudding.

"Jack and the Bean-stalk" is more unmercifully handled than even "Hop-o'-my-Thumb." The whole story is taken to pieces and built up on a new model, in which history and fiction, facts and fairies, modern philanthropy and old-world benevolence, are plastered together in a distorted caricature of the simple, truthful old fiction. We have heard much of restoring the monuments of Westminster Abbey. If Mr. Scott intends to follow the example of Mr. George Cruikshank, he cannot do better than begin by making a Siamese-Twin monument for Edward I. and Mr. Wilberforce. Fancy Jack living in the time of Alfred the Great, and having a sister called Ady! Fancy his father being Sir Ethelbert, an imprisoned Saxon knight! Fancy the giant being merely a large Dane, and the bean-stalk only growing up to the lofty cliff where he lives! Fancy all this jumbled up with a more than ordinarily recondite apparatus of real fairies, and the whole summed up with red lights and a display of fireworks, and some idea may be formed of the pitiable condition to which Mr. George Cruikshank has reduced this delightful old story. Instead of allowing the poor giant, after having been stripped of his property, to break his neck naturally from the bean-stalk, and so make a good and satisfactory end, Mr. George Cruikshank binds him up by a dull form of rythmical enchantment, never sung in any nursery, and then puts him on a moral treadmill, and makes him drag on a protracted existence in great wretchedness and sobriety:

"A council was then held as to what was to be done with the Giant—whether he was to be killed or kept prisoner. Jack's mother, out of gratitude to the Giantess for having saved her life and the lives of her children, and indeed, as it appeared, her husband's life also, prayed the king to spare the Giant's life. King Alfred granted her petition; and being a wise king, he determined to turn such great

strength to some useful purpose, and therefore placed him under guard in the royal quarries, to hew out great stones for building royal and public places. The Giant's wife was allowed to live with him; and as he never had any intoxicating liquor to get tipsy with, he never beat or ill-used her any more, and they lived happily for many years."

Happily the artist's instinct makes head against the author's weakness; and the giant of the picture is a real genuine Giant, and not an overgrown Dane.

Nothing is so hurtful to a child as this inseparable intermixture of history and fiction. It is certain to deprave his taste, which you will find instinctively to rebel against it, and it may confuse his sense of veracity. The most truthful child very readily discovers the nature of imaginative fiction, and keeps it apart in his mind from the facts he lays hold of as realities of the past, and it is most unwise to perplex him in his distinctions. As many ogres, dwarfs, fairies, and enchanted princesses as you please, only don't mix them with Danes and the Corn-Laws; and let the lessons that fairy-stories naturally teach remain unencumbered with principles of general benevolence and the enforcement of necessary sanitary improvements. And as to the bad morality, the slur Mr. Cruikshank casts on our old friends, and the fears he entertains of the spread of their example, is very uncalled for. Children don't look too nicely into the stomachs of giants, and their appetite for slaughter is a very harmless thing. They picture things vividly, but not minutely or precisely. Greatly as they love details when brought before them, their fancy has little power of supplying them. A child tells his story with the broadest possible statements of fact, and omits the subordinate accompaniments; and the best old tales adopt the same manner, relieving it by picturesque vividness in one or two special instances of minute detail. These shocking incidents, which wring the unhappy Mr. Cruikshank's heart, and fill his head with visions of blood and bowels, run without any

such horrible deposits through the open mind of the child ; and though he would shrink with terror from the sight of a wound, and weep at the least injury to those he loves, he does not scruple to lead scores of giants to the gallows, and behead all the ogres that come in his way. Are they not his natural enemies, too ? They are taken for granted in all his romances as *feræ naturæ*, pests of the earth, and fair booty to every champion who has the courage and address to lay them low.

But it is not necessary to plead for the character of these doughty heroes, or to maintain the unimpeachable morality of their memoirs. The truth is, the child does not drag them into the Court of Ethics at all ; at any rate he soon learns to look at them as occupying an unmoral ground of their own. Lamb's plea for the dramatists of Charles the Second's time may, with far more justice, be used for the actors in these stories. They dwell in the land of romance, far away from the realities of life ; and the child's instincts appreciate this, and he is in no danger of adopting the guile of Puss in Boots, or the marauding disposition of Jack of the Bean-stalk. They bring him neither good nor evil in a moral point of view ; but they supply food for his imagination and his sense of humour. It is true the more blood-thirsty among them may not be adapted for too tender and susceptible dispositions, to which they sometimes occasion terror and distress ; but such instances we should rather judge to be tokens of a want of due robustness in the character of the particular child than as proof that such tales are unfitted for children in general.

We recommend "all instructors of youth" to buy the books, burn the letter-press, and preserve the pictures ; and we earnestly entreat George Cruikshank to renounce his sacrilegious alterations, and be to us again what he once was.

THE POLICE.*

SIR ROBERT PEEL'S Act, organising our present Police Force, was one of the many executive Reforms which entitle his memory to the gratitude of the community. On the whole, it has worked well ; but those fears which at the time of its introduction were so broadly expressed, that it would open opportunities for petty oppression, and trench on that personal liberty which is an Englishman's peculiar boast, have proved to be not entirely without foundation. The upper and middle classes are excessively unwilling to listen to any animadversions on the Police ; they derive all the benefits of the institution, and its defects very rarely touch them. Their property and their persons are protected, and they owe to the Policeman freedom from a thousand anxieties. To them he is the well-attired respectful officer, ever ready to assist them in little difficulties ; temperate though steady in his opposition to venial infringements of the law ; is sensible enough to wink at a little excess in well-dressed men ; is a name of terror to importunate beggars and insolent cabmen ; and even if he be a little too familiar down-stairs, the good housekeeper tolerates his constant attendance as the best protection from burglars, just as she keeps a cat, though he too may now and then make free in the larder.

Yet there is a class to whom the Policeman does not appear to fulfil simply the functions of a Guardian Angel. It is a class who never want him to clear the way to a carriage ; whom he very inadequately protects from any

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but the last extremes of violence ; whom sometimes his duties and sometimes his temper require him to coerce ; to whom he does not feel bound to be polite ; and whom if drunk he takes not home, but to the station-house. Among this class there is a soreness of feeling about the Police, which is a very unpleasant symptom. It arises less from the inconvenience endured from a vigorous execution of real duties (the thieves don't feel it) than from petty acts of oppression and injustice. That arbitrary power, even within a very narrow range, cannot be entrusted to men, especially uneducated men, without some degree of abuse, is a truth that should only make us the more anxious to limit so inevitable an evil, and neither indolence nor cowardice ought to prevent us from steadily repressing it within the very narrowest boundaries. The Policeman is protected in the discharge of his duty by a special severity of the law, and rightly so ; but, on the other hand, a breach of the law by its appointed guardians constitutes, and ought to be visited as a double offence. Several incidents lately have tended to show that our Police are growing too sensible of the power and immunity of their office, and not sufficiently so of its responsibilities. Some of the Metropolitan parishes have laid formal complaints of them before the Secretary of State. The temporary deification they received at the time of the Great Exhibition, when they were felt doubly necessary, and therefore doubly adored by all old ladies and feeble persons generally, has, we fear, done something permanently to impair their character. A Policeman on duty considers himself *taboo*, a sacred vessel ; to "interfere with a Policeman in the discharge of his duty" is a recognised expression for the worst form of *lèse-majesté* now known ; and the holy man himself thinks it no less a crime to interpose where he is acting in excess of his duty, or even when culpably departing from it. The great flaw in the working of the system, and the practical point to which we wish to draw attention, is the extreme

difficulty of obtaining redress in case of any infraction of the Law by the Police.

The poorer classes never attempt it; a brief experience has proved to them its fruitlessness, and the hopelessness of attaining to the truth; they bear the insolence of office in silence, but not without heart-burning; and when the higher classes on some rare occasions are brought into collision with the Police, they are astonished, petrified to find that even for one of them justice is difficult. That a coalheaver should have his head broken and himself be imprisoned for the assault; well, that is an accident that will sometimes occur, good order must be kept, the Police are a praiseworthy body of men, it is not only troublesome, it is ungrateful, to inquire too closely into these matters: but that a clergyman should thus have the tables turned on him, and find himself charged on solemn oath with being drunk and violently assaulting an officer with a stick, this naturally amazes an innocent clergyman, it astonishes his friends, it excites the *Morning Chronicle*, the Secretary of State is stirred up, and the matter inquired into and redressed.

The main difficulties arise from the *esprit de corps* that must always exist in an organised body, and still more from the tendency that frequent appearance in the Courts of Justice as a witness has to blunt a nice sense of the obligation of an oath. It is a sense of the dangers attending an *esprit de corps* that has made the civilians of England so excessively, and yet so justly, sensitive to any encroachment on the part of the army. It is a feeling remarkably strong in the Police Force, and we regret to observe occasional symptoms that even the Police Magistrates do not always rise above it. Officials must bear one another out; it is a mutual service which saves much inconvenience. The system might be illustrated by some awkward cases of hard swearing, and one or two in which a Policeman having been proved guilty of a serious crime, it was found impossible to apprehend him. Had he been any

body else, no corner in the world could have concealed him; but being a Policeman—his face, his habits, and his haunts, all familiar to his brothers—they quietly pronounce him '*non est inventus*,' and he is not heard of again.

As to the other point, it is usual, in a Police-court especially, to prefer the oath of an officer to that of another man, and, doubtless, a magistrate who, when oath is opposed to oath, can judge only by deportment, will often decide justly in his favour; but this ought not to be *because* he is a Policeman, as some of our Justices seem to think; on the contrary, this fact is certainly something against his entire truthfulness. It may seem harsh to say so; but, in a case of difficulty, it is undoubtedly true that, other things being equal, the oath of a Policeman is entitled to less credence than that of a private man. He is more callous. Let any one go into a Criminal Court and contrast the evidence of a man newly admitted to the force with that of a veteran. The former swears like a common man, is not always sure, may make trifling discrepancies, does not remember exactly, may be confused by the opposite counsel, and descends with shaken nerves among the contemptuous smiles of his companions. Observe the "experienced officer," who takes his place; he is thoroughly honest, and would be *bonâ fide* hurt and astonished at any imputation of perjury; but he feels that the case depends on him—he knows the man at the bar for an old thief—he has not a doubt he is guilty, and he has no notion of letting him escape. Observe how well he knows the "pinch" of the case—how clear, how irresistible his evidence is on that point—how *exactly* he recollects every fact—how perfectly free he is from doubt or hesitation; his evidence has no hazy margin, every line is sharp and distinct; he tells you the exact words used, the exact hour, the exact amount of light, never varies, never forgets, and all with a steady leaning, whose value only the experienced can appreciate. Are there two

witnesses, one for the prosecution, and one for the defence, and both drunk ; listen to his way of putting it. " Was the prosecutor drunk ?—A little fresh, sir." " Was John Smith, for the defence, drunk ?—Far gone in liquor, sir," with a shake of the head worthy of Lord Burleigh ; " far gone in liquor." If part of a truth come out, it gives him no anxiety that the remainder is in favour of the prisoner. Cross-examination falls off him like rain from oilskin. He descends happy in his own self-approval and in that of his superiors. He is more than ever a valuable officer ; and though the judge estimates him exactly and the bar too to the back benches, they know the man is guilty, and the jury who don't know have great confidence in Sergeant A 45. And he has told the truth in the main ; but the truth stuffed a little at the chest, and padded a little at the sides, and squeezed in the waist, and made presentable. There is little or no harm done in such a case as this, except to the Policeman himself ; but his conscience gets blunted by a long experience of this sort, the limits between truth and falsehood grow less clear to him ; and where his own character, or even his own reputation for sagacity and accuracy are involved, he will not always shrink from a direct lie. He requires a strong check ; and the punishment for perjury in a Policeman, replete, as the crime is, with mischief to the community, ought always to be administered with the fullest severity of the Law. It has a frightfully demoralizing effect, if a man of the lower classes finds himself confronted with a Policeman, the latter swearing falsely, and believed, and his own true statement scouted.

THACKERAY ON SWIFT.*

PROBABLY the main reason why such contradictory views of the character of Swift have been given to the world is, because he was himself so different a man at different times of his life. Those who saw him in the height of his prosperity, holding by the pure force of character and genius a foremost place in society, knit in close friendship and companionship with the most eminent men of his day, with scope for his large love of power, "dictating," in Johnson's phrase, "the politics of the English nation," an equal among equals, with free play for his vast abilities, and a worthy audience for the unrivalled wit and humour of his conversation, these might call him as even the cold-tempered Addison did, "the most agreeable companion, the truest friend, and the greatest genius of his age;" others, who saw him only in his later days, banished from those he most loved, stript by death of the object of his deepest affections, broken down by illness and disappointment, morose, uncertain, liable to break into sudden fits of fury, with failing memory and feeble mind, a prey to avarice, a melancholy spectacle of fallen greatness dragging his miserable years to the grave, might easily, with the aid of a little native malice of disposition, draw such a picture of him as Lord Orrery has furnished.

Strong as is the main thread of identity that runs

* This brief Essay was one section of a notice of Mr. Thackeray's *English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*, contributed by Mr. Roscoe to *The Inquirer* of August 22d, 1853. Imperfect as it is, it was, I know, the result of much careful study of Swift's life and writings; and is, I think, worth preservation in a permanent form.—*Editor*.

through his whole nature, yet the opposite tendencies of it are displayed so separately and so completely, that his character hangs in the air of controversy like that fabled shield whose sides of different metal kindled the disputes of combatants who approached it by opposite roads. In the course of his life the balance of his character was utterly reversed; the qualities that once shone brightly, sank into darkness, and their opposites rose from the ill-maintained control to which they had been subjected into the place of unopposed dominion. Such a change, however, in a man, though it gives room for abundant contradiction in biographers, does not necessarily make it more difficult to read his whole character; the very capacity for so striking a change is in itself an important trait. It indicates force, but particularly it indicates the very opposite of a tempered and harmonized nature; it indicates fierce, impetuous, energetic elements pressing each for a full swing, and if restrained at all, bound into coerced juxtaposition, not harmony, by the rigorous repression of a strong will, and apt, when the restraints of such a will are sapped by age, or neglected in sullen apathy, to fly abroad in the wildest disorder.

It stands written in the records of Trinity College, Dublin, that it was *speciali gratiâ*, by special favour, that the young Swift obtained his first degree. This was because the necessitous student, greatly dependent on his University success, had formed a strong opinion against the prevailing system of Logic (which Martinus Scriblerus afterwards introduced to more general admiration), and utterly declined to peruse Smeglesius, Bergersdicius, and every analogous class of authors. In consequence of his remissness in this respect, he was plucked on his first going up; yet he presented himself on the next occasion with Smeglesius, and all his et ceteras, as rigidly neglected as ever. His friends, finding he would not swim for himself, were obliged to pull him through; and this was the way the authorities managed to reconcile lenity

with a tender regard for the required accomplishment. At the disputation his antagonist delivered his argument in tierce against the unprotected reason of Swift, who met it as he best could, and returned an answer, conclusive, we have no doubt, but dressed in the coarse phrase level to common apprehension; the Proctor standing ready, received this blow as it passed, transformed and graced it with the apt ornaments of scholastic logic, and so transmitted it to the opponent, who was duly qualified to parry and return in kind. The inflexibility of temper which Swift displayed on this occasion was still more strikingly and most sadly displayed in his declining years. Oppressed with years and bitter melancholy; troubled with a giddiness and deafness which deprived him of the resources of society; afflicted with the most terrible of all afflictions, the sense of impending loss of reason, he yet deprived himself of the only solace within his reach—that of reading—because he had “formed a resolution” against the use of spectacles. This stubbornness of disposition (and if stubbornness be a fixity of will disproportioned to the occasion, and regardless of consequence, there never was an apter instance of it), this wilful, dogged persistency, was one of the most remarkable ingredients in Swift’s character.

But this obstinacy and his Lucifer-like pride, too, were secondary elements; the basis and main-spring of his being was a rigid and engrossing concentration in self. He could be disinterested and generous in *act*, benevolent, friendly, patriotic, and yet never move from the fixed centre of self. No man ever more strongly exemplified the truth how little the mere instincts, even of the highest kind, really constitute any element in the perfection of character, except as they are under the controlling influence of a purified conscience. There never was a man of stronger benevolent feeling than Swift. He suffered in the sufferings of others. It was an exquisite pleasure to him to give pleasure. He was harsh and

cruel only for some dominant object or some hasty impulse of temper. When he was devoting all his energies to the utter exclusion and routing out of the Whigs from all share in office, he was most anxious that the literary hangers-on of the party should not be deprived of mere places of emolument. He writes to Stella,—“Do you know I have taken more pains to recommend the Whig wits to the favour and mercy of the Ministers than any other people? Steele I have kept in his place; Congreve I have got to be used kindly, and secured. Rowe I have recommended and got a promise of a place. Philips I should certainly have provided for, if he had not run party-mad and made me withdraw my recommendations. I set Addison so right at first, that he might have been employed, and have partly secured him the place he has.” Injustice and oppression tortured him, and that depression of spirit he suffered in Ireland was due, in far greater measure than Mr. Thackeray or others perceive, to the constant sight of the miseries and intolerable wrongs inflicted on a corrupt and slavish-tempered people. He asked Dr. Delany once, “Whether the corruptions and villanies of men in power did not eat his flesh and exhaust his spirits?” But he felt these things as a man feels pleasure or pain, from the influence of inanimate objects, only as they affected himself. He gave alms as a child eats fruit, and raged against tyranny like a sick man cursing the fever that devours his bones.

He was a man of the strongest affections, and possessed a sensitive and deep-feeling tenderness often attendant on these strong-willed stubborn natures, that are like the ash, the toughest and most enduring of all trees, which puts forth the tenderest green in the spring. Incapable of the passion of love—unless his temporary regard for Vanessa may merit that name—Swift could maintain with unfailing constancy friendships scarcely its inferior in warmth, but with no tinge of the self-devotion that is necessary to ennoble both. With Swift, more than with

most men, they were but as ministers to himself that he valued the attachments which bound him to others. "I think," he says, in one of those affecting letters in which he writes of the approaching death of Stella, "there is not a greater folly than that of entering into too strict and particular a friendship, with the loss of which a man must be absolutely miserable, but especially at an age when it is too late to engage in a new friendship." It is but justice to quote another passage, where the affection is more apparent and self less prominent: "I have yours just now of the nineteenth, and the account you give me is nothing but what I have sometime expected with the utmost agonies. It was at this time the best office your friendship could do not to deceive me. I look upon this to be the greatest event that can ever happen to me, but all my preparations will not suffice to make me bear it like a philosopher, nor altogether like a Christian. There has been the most intimate friendship between us from her childhood, and the greatest merit on her side that ever was in one human creature towards another. Nay, if I were now near her, I would not see her; I could not behave myself tolerably, and should redouble her sorrow. Judge in what a temper of mind I write this. The very time I am writing, I conclude the fairest soul in the world has lost its body—Confusion! that I am this moment called down by a visitor, when I am in the country and it is not in my power to deny myself. I have passed a very constrained hour and now return to say I know not what. I have been long weary of the world, and shall for my small remainder of years be weary of life, having for ever lost that conversation which alone could make it tolerable." Yet this was the woman whose whole life, devoted to him, was embittered by the indulgence of one of his obstinate whims, which bound her to him by the marriage ceremony alone, without allowing her either the name or the observances of a wife. And when this child whom he had brought up—this woman who had lived only for him,

and knitted herself thus closely to his heart-strings—this “pure star in that dark and tempestuous life of Swift”—lay dying, that end deplored with such heart-wrung anguish close at hand, he could disregard her dying entreaties, leave her with silent and sullen indignation in his heart and features, and abstain from ever seeing her again. “As she found her final dissolution approach, a few days before it happened, in the presence of Dr. Sheridan” (we quote from the life of his son), “she addressed Swift in the most earnest and pathetic manner to grant her dying request. That as the ceremony of marriage had passed between them, though for sundry considerations they had not cohabited in that state, in order to put it out of the power of slander to be busy with her fame after death, she adjured him by their friendship to let her have the satisfaction of dying at least, though she had not lived, his acknowledged wife. Swift made no reply, but turning on his heel, walked silently out of the room, nor ever saw her afterwards during the few days she lived. This behaviour threw Mrs. Johnson into unspeakable agonies, and for a time she sunk under the weight of so cruel a disappointment.” Surely, never in any other human heart have stubbornness and pride had such a victory; he would not return, partly because he could not bear to lacerate his heart with the sight of the anguish he had inflicted; but what did he, so capable of suffering, undergo, as his Stella lay dying alone and unreconciled?

What a pity it is that brilliancy and judgment are so rarely united! Mr. Thackeray scatters thickly his “barbaric pearls and gold,” rich matter from which to form an opinion of your own, but furnishing himself the grounds for showing that he judges hastily and imperfectly. His shafts of flying insight touch here and there with wonderful precision, but at such disconnected points that they deceive himself. Full of striking beauties as is his sketch of Swift, it seems to us not less full of patent errors, and to indicate, not, perhaps, so much a misconception as the

absence of any consistent conception of the man he is dealing with. But this is the nature of his mind. He does not want to go too far. It is enough for him to have a general idea of striking characteristics : he loves to stand at a distance, and see the lights and shadows playing on the hills, rather than embrace and master the varying prospect. Nor is this inconsistent with microscopic minuteness : however near he comes, he is still engrossed by the salient points.

Surely he is radically wrong when he speaks of the "heaven which [Swift] adored with such real wonder, humility, and reverence." "For Swift's," he adds, "was a reverent, was a pious spirit. For Swift could love and could pray. Through the storms and tempests of his furious mind the stars of religion and love break out in the blue, shining serenely, though hidden by the driving clouds and the maddened hurricane of his life." Swift seems to us, on the contrary, like many men of great intellectual power, to have been strictly limited by the earthly circle of things. By a sustained effort of his unyielding will he *would not* disbelieve ; and that was pretty much the sum of his religion. He approached divine things with fitting observance, and every regard for decency ; he had even a real and deep-seated respect for them ; but no blue heaven embraced for him this contracted world—no harbour of refuge lay serene over the waste and raging waters. He was buoyed up by no spiritual faith when the angry waves swirled him to and fro, and cast him at last to die in barren and sandy shallows of the ebbing tide. Broadly and keenly he looked at men and human affairs, with an all-embracing width of vision, and a piercing, if a distorted, eye ; but as to the spiritual world, he coldly assumed what he chose to deem necessary, averted his gaze, and passed by on the other side. And his love, like his insight, was mortal, intertwined inextricably with the thread of life, and liable to "the blind Fury with the abhorred shears." Let us

take another passage, in which Mr. Thackeray writes very forcibly and positively, but seems to us to do great injustice to Swift, without having any reasonable data for his opinion. It is that rash, hazardous, effective sort of writing, which goes up with a blaze and a rush like a rocket ; but, like that, too, very uncertain in its course, and you must take your chance where the stick falls :

“ Would we have liked to live with him ? That is a question which, in dealing with these people's works, and thinking of their lives and peculiarities, every reader of biographies must put to himself. Would you have liked to be a friend of the great Dean ? I should like to have been Shakspeare's shoeblack—just to have lived in his house, just to have worshipped him—to have run on his errands, and seen that serene face. I should like, as a young man, to have lived on Fielding's staircase in the Temple, and after helping him up to bed perhaps, and opening his door with his latch-key, to have shaken hands with him in the morning, and heard him talk and crack jokes over his breakfast and his mug of small beer. Who would not give something to pass a night at the club with Johnson, and Goldsmith, and James Boswell, Esq., of Auchinleck ? The charm of Addison's companionship and conversation has passed to us by fond tradition ; but Swift—? If you had been his inferior in parts (and that, with a great respect for all persons present, I fear is only very likely), his equal in mere social station, he would have bullied, scorned, and insulted you ; if, undeterred by his great reputation, you had met him like a man, he would have quailed before you, and not had the pluck to reply, and gone home, and years after written a foul epigram about you—watched for you in a sewer, and come out to assail you with a coward's blow and a dirty bludgeon. If you had been a lord with a blue ribbon, who flattered his vanity, or could help his ambition, he would have been the most delightful company in the world. He would have been so manly, so sarcastic, so bright, odd, and original, that you might think he had no object in view but the indulgence of his humour, and that he was the most reckless, simple creature in the world. How he would have torn your enemies to pieces for you, and made fun of the Opposition ! His servility was so boisterous that it looked like independence ; he would have done your errands, but with the air of patronizing you, and after fighting your battles masked in the street or the press, would have kept on his hat before your wife and

daughters in the drawing-room, content to take that sort of pay for his tremendous services as a bravo.

He says as much himself in one of his letters to Bolingbroke: 'All my endeavours to distinguish myself were only for want of a great title and fortune, that I might be used like a lord by those who have an opinion of my parts; whether right or wrong is no great matter. And so the reputation of wit and great learning does the office of a blue ribbon or a coach and six.'

Could there be greater candour? It is an outlaw who says, 'These are my brains; with these I'll win titles and compete with fortune. These are my bullets; these I'll turn into gold;' and he hears the sound of coaches and six, takes the road like Macheath, and makes society stand and deliver. They are all on their knees before him. Down go my lord bishop's apron, and his grace's blue ribbon, and my lady's brocade petticoat in the mud. He eases the one of a living, the other of a patent place, the third of a little snug post about the Court, and gives them over to the followers of his own. The great prize has not come yet. The coach with the mitre and crosier in it, which he intends to have for *his* share, has been delayed on the way from St. James's; and he waits and waits until nightfall, when his runners come and tell him that the coach has taken a different road, and escaped him. So he fires his pistols into the air with a curse, and rides away into his own country."

There never was a falser picture. It is true those who gave him offence incurred scorn and insult; but he was not a vain, stentorian old bully in conversation, like Dr. Johnson, and his blows fell tolerably irrespective of social station; and he was neither the man to be cowed by resistance, nor to nourish a coward's revenge. His resentment was fierce, undying, fatal, easily excited, and hesitating at no cruelty or injustice; thinking no weapon too coarse or too malignant, and no point too vital to be aimed at. But it was open. It was every thing bad, except cowardly and concealed: that it was not. The anonymousness of his writings arose from quite a different class of considerations.

The authorities Mr. Thackeray quotes in support of the main opinions in the above passage seem to us cu-

riously ill-adapted to support his view. "I am much inclined to believe," writes Lord Orrery, "that the temper of my friend Swift might occasion his English friends to wish him happily and properly promoted at a distance. His spirit—for I would give it the proper name—was ever intractable. The motions of his genius were often irregular. He assumed more the air of a patron than a friend; he affected rather to dictate than advise." This to prove that he was boisterously servile. The following is to prove that his conversation was dictated by vanity and ambition, and that he was cowardly in his revenge, and comes from the same author, who knew him in his decline only, and made the worst he could of him: "He had not the least tincture of vanity in his conversation. He was, perhaps, as he said himself, too proud to be vain. When he was polite, it was in a manner entirely his own. In his friendships he was constant and undisguised. He was the same in his enmities." As to his servility, Mr. Thackeray has written so much about snobs that his mind seems to have got confused on the subject. Every thing he writes is apt to take the colour of snobbishness and tastes of footmen. Swift was not a snob. Swift had not the least respect for a lord with a blue ribbon, *quâ* lord with blue ribbon. He had no servility in his disposition, nor would do any thing for the highest of his patrons but what his own principles (such as they were), and even his own caprice, approved. He broke with the Whigs, when they were anxious to secure him, in great measure because he would not go their lengths. He criticised in the freest manner the public measures of Lord Oxford, the dearest male friend he ever possessed, and who, if any man, had the power to make or unmake him. He made independent and penniless genius more respected than rank and office. He was arrogant and overbearing, and the way he chose to make sure of his position was, to thrust his equality and superiority upon the titled gentlemen and ladies around him, often with

rudeness and even brutality ; he trampled down opposition, he was a stranger to fear, and his haughty trenchant demeanour was natural, and not the cover of flattery and cringing. But this sprang from temper and pride, not from any thing noble in his disposition ; he had not a spark of generosity in his whole nature, no man who had could have been as proud as he was, and yet have wanted the capacity to appreciate a just self-respect in others. "Whenever," says Dr. Sheridan, — and Mr. Thackeray quotes the passage,—

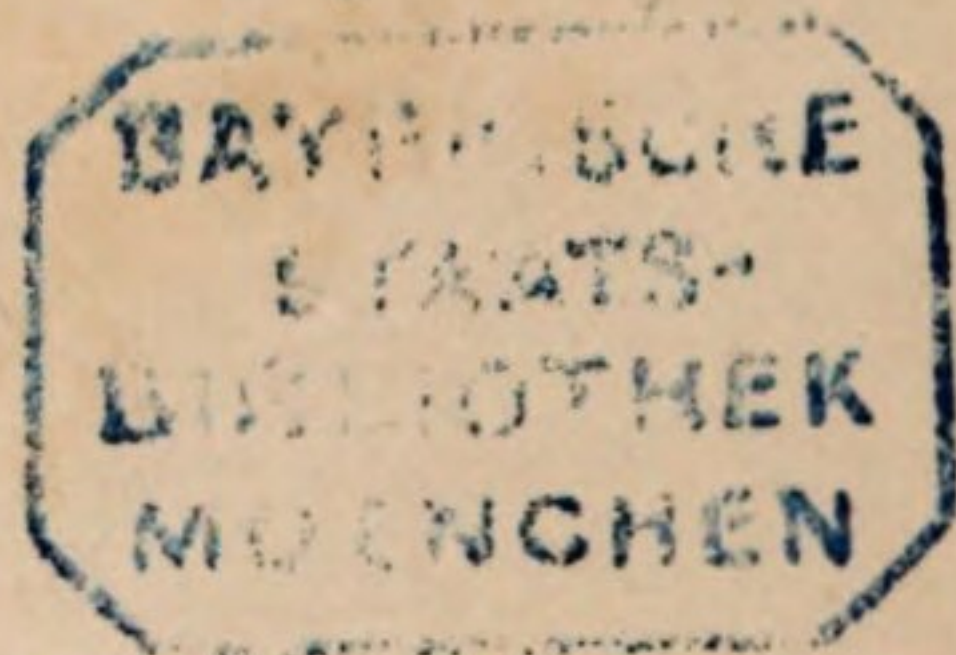
"he fell into the company of any person for the first time, it was his custom to try their tempers and disposition by some abrupt question that bore the appearance of rudeness. If this were well taken, and answered with good humour, he afterwards made amends by his civilities. But if he saw any marks of resentment from alarmed pride, vanity, or conceit, he dropped all further intercourse with the party. This will be illustrated by an anecdote of that sort related by Mrs. Pilkington. After supper, the Dean having decanted a bottle of wine, poured what remained into a glass, and, seeing it was muddy, presented it to Mr. Pilkington to drink it. 'For,' said he, 'I always keep some poor parson to drink the foul wine for me.' Mr. Pilkington, entering into his humour, thanked him, and told him, 'he did not know the difference, but was glad to get a glass at any rate.' 'Why then,' said the Dean, 'you shan't, for I'll drink it myself. Why, — take you, you are wiser than a paltry curate whom I asked to dine with me a few days ago ; for upon my making the same speech to him, he said he did not understand such usage, and so walked off without his dinner. By the same token, I told the gentleman who recommended him to me that the fellow was a block-head, and I had done with him.' "

Mrs. Pilkington's finale to the visit on which this occurred is not less characteristic of the way in which the Dean required obtuseness from others in those points on which he was himself most sensitive. As they were going away, she tells us, their host slipped into her hand "as much money as she and Mr. Pilkington had given at the offering in the morning, and coach-hire also, which she durst not refuse, lest she should have been deemed as

great a blockhead as the parson who refused thick wine." And this was the man who, when Lord Oxford, in the beginning of their intimacy, and then at the head of affairs, sent him 50*l.*,—a compliment in those times deemed in no degree derogatory to a man of letters to accept,—not only sent it back, but refused to be reconciled to the sender, or even to see him until he had made him an apology.

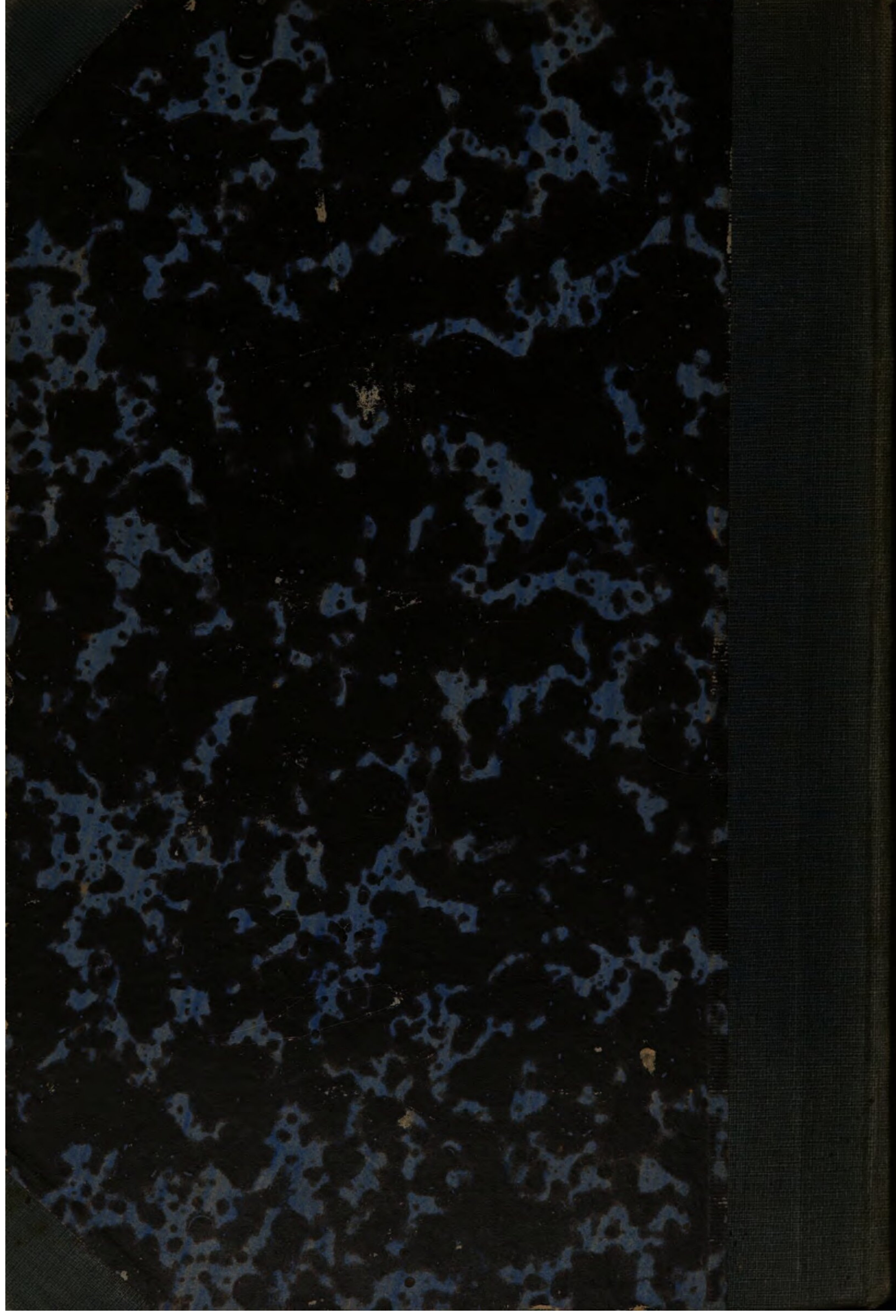
Swift's ambition, too, was something different from what Mr. Thackeray would lead us to believe. With all his devotion to self, he took the view of a great mind, if not of a noble nature, in estimating what was desirable for self. Self-indulgence had no charm for him, nor had show and glitter ; he relished the substance of power too well to be very solicitous about the appearance of it, though he did not dislike that ; but he loved better to be a constant guest at the Minister's Saturday evening party, where state measures were discussed and settled, than he would have done to be such a Secretary of State as Addison. Swift never cared much to be a bishop ; it was the loss of influence, of social intercourse with great men, the exile, the shelving of his residence in Ireland, that so galled and fretted him.

END OF VOL. II.



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